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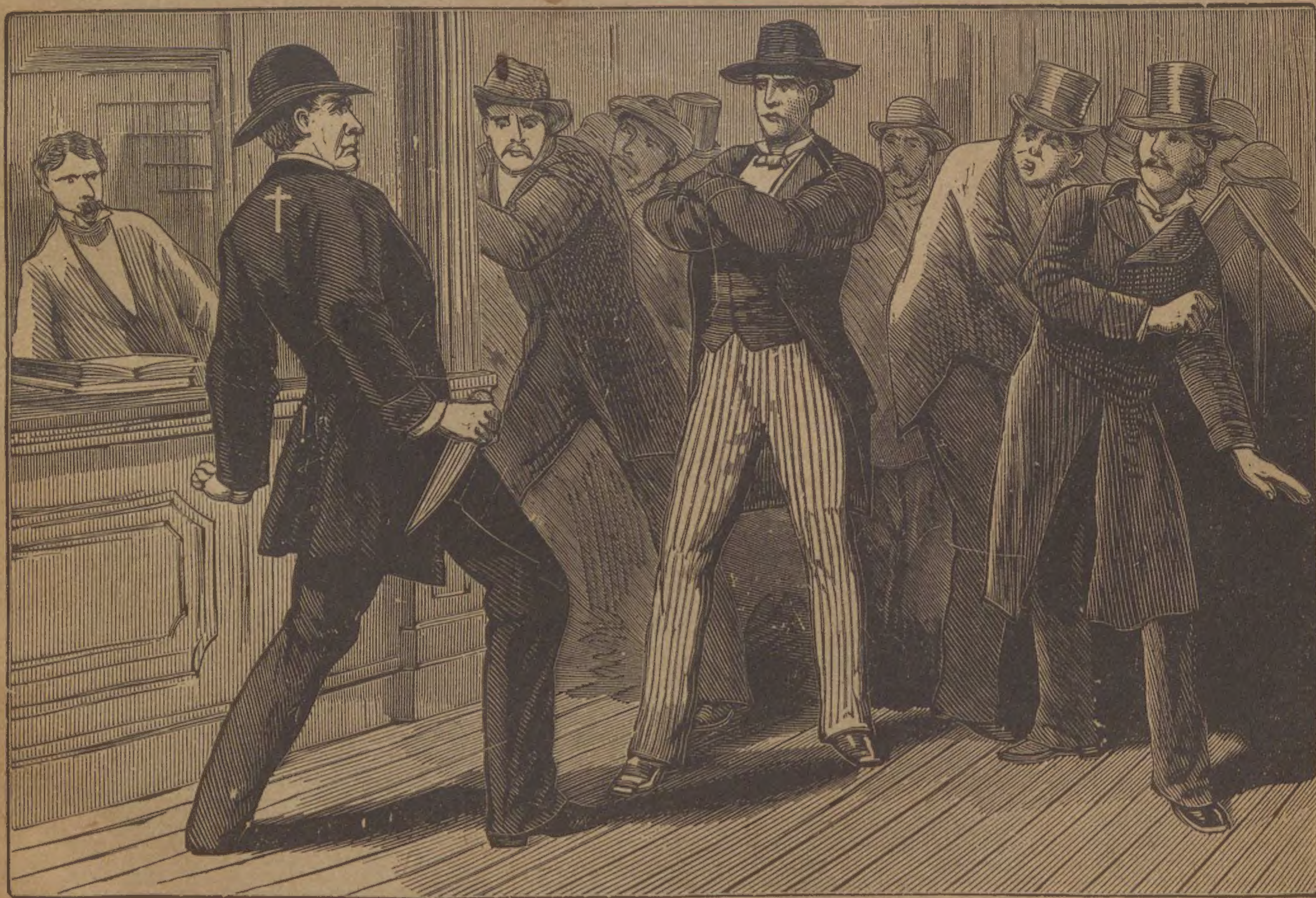
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Vol. II.

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UNDER THE GALLOWS.

By A U. S. DETECTIVE.



"Man or devil!" he exclaimed, flashing his bright bowie in the gaslight. "I defy you, do your worst!"

CHAPTER I.

THE MASKED BALL—A DRUGGED STAR, AND THE RESCUE.

"HEAVENS, Charlie, look there!"
"What is it, Ernest?"
"That magnificent creature over there, leaning on the arm of Mercury."
"Oh, that's the evening star! Isn't she brilliant?"
"I should say so. I never saw so much beauty of form and queenliness of carriage combined. I'd give a week's salary to see her face and hear her—"

"Mashed! ha-ha-ha!" chuckled Charlie. "She may be an old huckster-woman's daughter, for all you know, Ernest."

"Hush—she's coming this way!"

"Sir Mercury is facetious—besides, his character was never good for veracity in old mythology," said the Evening Star, as she passed Ernest Howland, and Charles Linton, two young clerks, who were spectators rather than active participants in the grand *ball masqué* at the New York Academy of Music.

"Such a sweet voice," murmured Ernest, in raptures, as the couple passed him; "and her perfumery is like a breeze from Araby the blest!"

"Got 'em bad," said Charlie with mock gravity; "shall I send for the ambulance, Ernest, my dear boy?"
"Yes, for yourself, if you like; I'm all-right, myself."
"I am not so sure of that. The symptoms are very—" "Oh, cheess it, Charlie! Here she comes again!"
Ere Charlie could utter another word, Ernest had taken his arm and forced him into the grand promenade of many gay maskers. Arm-in-arm, they

marched behind Mercury and the Evening Star. A more lovely form than the Evening Star was not to be found in that vast throng of gay revelers. Ernest Howland could see no one but her, while his less appreciative companion cast his eyes over the gay scene, in quest of whatever was novel or odd. The costumes of all ages, reaching back to the primitive couple in the Garden of Eden, were to be seen there; so Charles Linton saw enough to amuse and interest him. But with Ernest Howland, he could neither see nor think of anything or anybody but that magnificent Evening Star. He never took his eyes off of her.

"I wonder if they know each other?" he thought to himself. "He seems to be in love with her," and a jealous pang shot through his heart at the bare thought of anyone but himself falling in love with one so beautiful.

"Ah! I will go, too," he muttered, as he heard her accept his invitation to go to the refreshment hall for a glass of wine. "Charlie, old fellow, wait here for me," and ere Charlie could say anything in reply, Ernest was lost in the throng.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Linton, softly. "Ernest is stuck again. I never saw such a susceptible fellow in my—"

"Will you honor me with your arm?" asked a sweet voice at his elbow, as a little, plump hand nestled on his arm, and a pair of sparkling, mischievous black eyes peered up at him from behind a blue silk domino.

"Thunder, yes!" was the quick response; quickly rejoining the gay promenaders, congratulating himself on his good fortune, while Ernest was pursuing a "will-o'-the-wisp" in the person of the enchanting Evening Star.

But was he more fortunate than Ernest?

Time alone can tell.

Ernest followed the couple into the refreshment-room, where scores of couples were already before them. He saw Mercury lead her to a seat, and then hasten to order the wine. He was gone but a few moments, for he returned with the wine himself. But before reaching her side, Ernest looked in his direction, and saw him dexterously drop a small, white powder into one of the glasses of wine.

"Good Heavens!" he gasped, with a start, "what does that mean, I wonder? I will warn her not to—ugh!"

He stepped on a piece of orange peel, and fell heavily to the floor. Several rushed forward to his assistance, lifting him to his feet, and detaining him by their solicitude until he was almost frantic in his efforts to get away from them. When he did succeed in releasing himself from their kind attentions, he was horrified to find Mercury and the Evening Star gone, and two empty wine-glasses left in the seats they occupied.

"She's lost—poisoned!" he groaned, dashing madly through the crowd, and rushing like a madman into the throng of revelers in the main hall. The vast auditorium was being partially cleared to make room for the dancers when he entered.

Among the first to enter for a waltz were Mercury and the Evening Star. They were the cynosure of all eyes for a while, by reason of the gracefulness of their movements.

But soon they were lost sight of in the gay whirl, though Ernest Howland never once took his eyes from them.

"What was it he put in her glass of wine?" he muttered, as he watched them among the hundreds of waltzers. "It is very singular, to say the least. She may be his wife, and—ha! she stops and leans heavily on his arm. She speaks to him, and he leads her to the ladies' cloak room! The poison is working—he supports her with his arm around her waist? What shall I do? By my soul, I will not let the villain escape the penalty of his crime, if crime it is. I'll follow and unmask him before her face!"

He pressed toward the cloak room in almost frantic eagerness, nearly upsetting a couple of maskers on the way. But before he reached it he saw them leaving by a side door, before which stood an interminable array of vehicles of every description. She seemed weak or ill, as he almost carried her by main strength with one arm around her waist.

To plunge out upon the street and intercept them was the first thought that dashed through Ernest Howland's brain. The next was to seize the unknown man and call the police, but ere he knew it he was by his side just as they were about to enter a carriage.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, addressing Mercury, "but is this lady your wife?"

"Yes," replied the Unknown, promptly.

"No, oh, no!" faltered the lady, half-uncon-

sciously, languidly raising her head. "Take me home, please."

"What treachery is this, sir?" demanded Ernest, seizing the lady's arm; "release this lady, or I'll hand you over to the police."

"Perdition!" hissed Mercury, flashing an ivory-hilted dagger in the glare of the gaslight.

"Hands off, or—"

"Not so fast, Sir Mercury," interrupted Ernest, who had nothing of the coward about him.

"I saw you drug that gl—"

Whack went the dagger against Ernest Howland's breast with such force as to cause him to stagger backwards a step or two. But the next moment he rallied, and gave the Unknown a terrific blow between the eyes that set him staring.

"Take that, you white-livered scoundrel!" exclaimed Ernest.

The Evening Star, having lost her support, was about to fall, when Ernest grasped her around the waist and held her up, whispering in her ear:

"You are with friends, lady, have no fears!"

Instantly a crowd gathered around the spot, closing up against Ernest and his charge. Mercury sprang to his feet, glared at the crowd, and then at the unknown youth, seeing that further resistance would be useless, not to say dangerous, under the circumstances. But he quickly reached forward over the shoulders of another and snatched the mask from Ernest's face, so that the glare of the street lamp fell full upon it.

"Ha! I know you, Ernest Howland!" he hissed, "and your doom is sealed from this hour!"

"I don't know who you are, sir," replied Ernest, as the Unknown sprang into the carriage, "but I brand you as a cowardly villain!"

The carriage whirled away with furious speed, leaving Ernest with the beautiful Evening Star his arms.

CHAPTER II.

THE WHITE CROSS AND THE BLACK DOMINO—THE MASKED MURDERER.

"WHAT'S the matter—what's the matter!" chorused a score of voices around Ernest Howland and the beautiful Unknown.

"Call a physician!" cried Ernest. "This lady has been drugged by a villain, and she may have drank enough to kill her."

"Where is she—my sister—my sister!" screamed a female, rushing out of the house, the crowd instantly opening a way for her. She was masked, and dressed to represent the Morning Star.

"We must take her to the hospital at once," said the physician, turning to the officer.

"No—no! Oh, no!" cried the Morning Star.

"Take her home—take her home, please!"

"Yes; that would be better," said the policeman.

A carriage was instantly taken possession of, and the almost unconscious lady placed in it with her sister. The policeman and physician entered, and the carriage drove off, leaving Ernest Howland, the real hero of the evening, standing on the sidewalk, surrounded by hundreds of eager inquirers.

He managed to get back into the academy, where the great body of the revelers went on with the festivities, unconscious of the crime committed in their midst.

Nearly an hour did he spend wandering about among the gay maskers, looking for Charles Linton, his friend and fellow clerk.

At last he found him, or rather he was found by Linton, who laid his hand familiarly on his shoulder, with:

"Halloo, Ernest, old boy! you must have mashed some poor girl, as she has placed a mark on your shoulder so she'd know you when you unmasked."

"A mark on my shoulder! What is it, Charlie?"

"A chalk mark—simply a small cross," replied Charlie. "Shall I rub it out?"

"Yes, by all means. I've had an adventure, Charlie."

"Indeed! So have I."

"But half the people in the house are talking about mine," said Ernest, as Charlie rubbed away the chalk mark with his handkerchief. He then briefly related the affair to his friend.

"By the great ring-tailed comet, Ernest!" ejaculated Charlie, turning pale, "that chalk mark meant something, then?"

"Yes. It was a mark for some enemy—probably an assassin."

"Why in thunder didn't you unmask him, Ernest?"

"I couldn't. I was supporting the lady in my arms when he tore my mask away."

"Well, you must go armed and be ready for him after this," said Charlie, "for he has the advantage of you."

"Yes. But mark me, Charles Linton—if ever I am attacked by any one after this without apparent provocation, I will slay the assailant on the spot if I can, believing him the villain of this evening's adventure."

"Ha—ha—ha!" chuckled a black domino behind him—a low, sinister chuckle that made Ernest instantly wheel around to face the author of it. He only saw a black domino slowly walking away.

"Did you hear that chuckle, Charlie?" he asked, looking at the retreating black domino.

"Yes," he replied, "and he left the chalk mark on your back again."

"He did?"

"Here it is, as plain as the first one," said Charlie, in a low whisper.

"That shows the scoundrel has confederates, and that they mean business."

"It looks like it."

"Keep your eye on the black domino, Charlie, till I come back."

"Where are you going?"

"Into the refreshment room."

"With that mark on your back?"

"Yes. I'll not leave the Academy with it, though."

Charles Linton immediately turned and followed after the black domino, and Ernest Howland slipped into the refreshment hall, where he beckoned to one of the waiters.

"What'll you have, sir?" asked the polite waiter, responding promptly to the summons.

"I want to give you a dollar for going out to buy me a red domino and a small piece of chalk."

"All right, sir, I'll be back in a jiffy," replied the waiter, taking the money and leaving his glasses on the table by the side of Ernest.

In less than ten minutes he was back again, with both articles securely wrapped in paper.

Ernest paid him, and taking the articles, entered a little private room, by permission of the proprietor of the refreshment hall, where he threw off his coat and erased every trace of chalk marks. Then putting on the red domino in place of the green one he had been wearing, he boldly emerged from the room and went in search of Linton. He was not long in finding him.

Of course Linton did not know him with the red domino, and was astonished when a red domino whispered in his ear:

"All right, Charlie—which is he?"

"A red one, eh! Good! That's your man, then, the black domino with his back turned this way."

Ernest sauntered by the black domino two or three times, and at last, when quite a crowd had surged that way, succeeded in placing a white cross on his back unperceived by any one except Charles Linton. Charlie was watching without suspicioning his friend's design. The moment he saw the white cross on the back of the black domino, he chuckled with delight as Ernest joined him.

"Ha-ha! turned the tables, by Jove! Best thing you ever did, Ernest."

"Hush!" cautioned Ernest, "don't call my name again above a whisper. We don't know who is listening. Just keep your eyes about you, and watch that black domino with the white cross."

Both of them watched, and ere long Ernest discovered a yellow domino following the white cross wherever it went. He never took his eyes off that fatal chalk mark. Into the "wee sma' hours ayant the twal" the two young friends, keeping side by side, followed and watched the black and yellow dominos. They followed them everywhere, and when the grand revelry closed and everybody was rushing towards the grand entrance, Ernest and Charles were almost amongst them. Suddenly, and with the rapidity of a flash of lightning, the yellow domino plunged a dagger to the hilt in the back of the black domino, and left it sticking there.

The black domino threw up both arms, and gasped:

"I'm stabbed!" and caught the nearest man for support.

"There's the man that did it!" cried Ernest, seizing the yellow domino firmly by the arm.

"I saw him do it."

"So did I," added Linton.

"It's all a mistake, gentlemen, I assure you," replied the yellow domino, utterly taken aback at being caught in the act, which never would have been the case had not Charles and Ernest been watching his slightest movements.

"No mistake at all, sir; I saw you stab the man, and leave the dagger sticking in him."

"Unmask the villain!" cried several excited men at once, as they made a ring around him and the wounded man. The wounded black domino was laid on the floor, apparently in the agonies of death.

Ernest Howland tore the yellow mask from the man's face and exposed him to the gaze of every one present. No one knew him.

A policeman rushed into the crowd and seized the prisoner.

"You are my prisoner, sir," he said.

The prisoner protested his innocence.

"I saw him do the stabbing," said Ernest Howland.

"Who are you?" asked the officer, turning to Ernest.

"Ernest Howland!" was the reply of the young clerk, raising the red domino and showing a handsome, determined face.

At the mention of the name the prisoner started as though stung by a hornet, and glared wildly into Howland's face. The next moment he stooped and snatched the black domino from the face of the wounded man on the floor.

"Good God—Allan!" he gasped, his face of an ashen hue.

"Yes, it's me, Perry!" groaned the dying man.

"How did it happen?"

"I don't know; it was a mistake, that cross on your back did it!"

"Cross on my back!" groaned the wounded man.

"Who put it there?"

"I don't know," said the prisoner. "I am innocent."

"Innocent, eh!" sneered Ernest. "Did it through mistake, didn't you? Thought it was somebody else?"

The prisoner made no reply, but fell back into a dogged assertion of his innocence.

"I have another witness," said Ernest, "Mr. Charles Linton, here."

Linton unmasked, and faced the prisoner.

"The victim can tell something about it, too, if he will," added Ernest, looking down at the dying man.

"He is not altogether innocent himself."

Everybody looked in amazement at the man on the floor, as if to hear what he had to say.

"It's all—mistake!" he gasped; "Perry didn't mean—to—to—ah—"

A paroxysm of pain seized upon him, and when it passed away his spirit went with it.

He was dead.

The prisoner drew a breath of relief.

"You all heard him say I was innocent," he said, looking around at the horror-stricken faces that were turned upon him.

"He said nothing of the kind," said Ernest, hotly. "He simply said it was a mistake. I know it was a mistake, for you intended to kill another man. Officer, I am ready to go with you and make the charge against him."

"So am I," added Linton, and together they went with him to the central police station, followed by hundreds of men and boys.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHAM ARREST, AND A BLOW FOR LIFE.

THE wild, exaggerated stories in the newspapers the next morning concerning the mysterious white cross and the still more mysterious murder, threw the city into a furore of excitement.

While it was a black domino that fell, others said they saw a green one wearing the white cross. Ernest Howland, of course, was overrun with eager inquirers at the store of his employer on Grand street. But he would say nothing until the proper time came.

The mail man brought him a letter. Tearing it open he read:

"Ten thousand dollars each, to you and Linton, if you will both leave the city to-night. Leave two buttons of your vest unloosed as a sign that you accept."

There was no signature to the letter. Howland turned it over and over, uncertain what to do with it. He beckoned to Charlie, and showed him the letter. They were both good and popular salesmen, though their salaries were not large.

Charlie gave a long whistle of astonishment.

"What shall we do, Charlie?"

"Unbutton your vest, Ernest," was the reply.

"What!" gasped Ernest, in surprise. "Will you go?"

"Yes, to Jersey," whispered Charlie.

"Oh," and Ernest's astonishment gave way to

a broad grin as he comprehended Charles Linton's game. "I'll unbutton, of course."

Both went back to their places behind the counters, and a steady stream of customers poured in and out of the house for several hours.

"Another letter for you, Mr. Howland," said the messenger of the store, laying a large full envelope on the counter before him.

Howland took it up and proceeded to open it, but a glimpse of greenbacks inside caused him to thrust it into his pocket to wait for a better opportunity to investigate its contents. Lunch hour came, and instead of going to the little restaurant where they usually got their meals, he and Charlie repaired to the nearest hotel, registered, paid for a room, and at once took possession of it.

Locking the door, Ernest drew out the package and handed it to Charlie. On opening it, twenty one thousand dollar bills fell out.

"Jerusalem!" ejaculated Linton, staring at the bills, "just look at that!"

"Let's look at this," said Ernest, taking up a note which had fallen with the bills, "and see what it says?"

"Read it."

"Now go," said Ernest, reading the note; "and remember that to return is to die. Fail at your peril."

(Signed.)

X."

Linton turned pale.

"By George, Ernest!" he exclaimed, "that places us in a tight place. I guess we had better drop it, and send the money back."

"Who shall we send it to? Mr. Daggers fails to give his address."

"Then let's throw up our situations and go."

"No; not for ten times the amount, poor as I am!"

"Why not?"

"Our flight would give the real assassin a chance to swear the crime on us, and the world would believe him. His confederates would corroborate his statements, indictments against us would follow, and then the detectives would be after us all around the world."

"What will you do, then?"

"Keep the money, and stay where we are."

"Is that honest?"

"Yes. The court would give us the money, until the owner came into the court and proved his claim."

"Which he would never do."

"Of course not."

"But they'll kill us!"

"Oh, they've tried to kill me already, you know."

"It makes me feel deucedly uncomfortable," said Charlie, after a pause of several minutes.

"We must always work, eat, sleep, and travel together," said Ernest, "and keep away from dangerous places, so they can have no chance to get away with us."

"And go armed all the time?" suggested Charlie, stowing ten of the bills in his pocket.

"Yes—armed to the teeth!" replied Howland, as they descended the stairs of the hotel.

Hurrying to the little restaurant and dispatching a hasty lunch, our two heroes hastened back to the store, and did not leave it until it closed for the day. They then repaired to a gun store, where they purchased weapons for defense, after which they returned to their boarding-house as unconcerned as though nothing unusual had happened.

They repaired at once to their room, and not until they came down to the breakfast-table the next morning were they seen again. When they reached the store, they found a letter for each awaiting them. They read:

"You have chosen to brave us. Twenty-four hours and your doom is sealed."

X."

"Let us keep together, Charlie, and they can't harm us," said Ernest. "They are trying to frighten us now."

The twenty-four hours passed, and nothing more had been heard from the mysterious parties. Ernest was cool and determined. Charlie was nervous and uneasy.

"Let's take a walk down Broadway, Charlie," suggested Ernest to his companion, on the evening of the third day after they had received the twenty thousand dollars.

"Is it safe, Ernest?"

"Yes, of course."

In Broadway they met thousands of people coming and going. They spent hour after hour in looking in the windows, and watching people going everywhere in quest of pleasure.

"There they are, the very men!" exclaimed a voice behind them, and the next moment, Ernest

and Charlie were seized by a couple of stalwart policemen.

"What does this mean?" cried Ernest, endeavoring to draw and defend himself.

"It means you are our prisoners," replied the officers. "Come along with us to the station house, and you'll find out all about it."

"I guess we'd better go, Charlie," said Ernest to his friend, "and see what the game is they are playing on us."

"Of course, that's the way to do, always," said one of the officers, "because you can't help yourselves."

"I am not so sure about that," replied Ernest, determinedly.

He was cool, calm and confident, though Charlie was as pale as death.

Linton mistrusted the officers, but said nothing of his suspicions to his companion.

"You had better not try to get away, even if you do think you can," said the policeman.

"Come on, sir."

Ernest and Charlie went with them down Broadway to Broome street. There Ernest Howland noticed that his accusers turned up that street, and that the officers were about to follow them.

"Where are you taking us?" he demanded.

"Come along!" gruffly ordered the officer, seizing him by the arm and grasping his club threateningly. "I'll run you in—don't be uneasy about that, sir."

"But —"

The officer raised his club menacingly, and Ernest thought it best to wait for another time to finish his protest. He walked quietly along by the side of the officer until they reached a narrow street, up which they turned, halting before a house in the middle of the block, while the man who had caused their arrest adjusted a key to the door.

"Go in, sir," said the officer, pushing Ernest before him with his club. Charles Linton followed close upon his heels. The officers followed, closing the door behind them.

A match was struck by one of the accusers, and in a glance our heroes discovered that the house was an unoccupied—deserted one.

"Great Heavens!" he thought, in a flash, "we are trapped! We must get away from here or we'll be murdered!"

He looked at the white face of his friend, and saw that he had his hand on his pistol in his pocket.

Giving Charlie the signal, he flashed his pistol in the policeman's face, and hissed:

"Move an inch and you are a dead man!"

"Stand!" cried Charlie, levelling his revolver at the other officer.

"The devil!"

"Hands up!" cried Ernest Howland, with a fierceness that caused four hands to fly up above two heads. Then turning around so as to have all four men facing him, he demanded:

"Of what am I accused?"

The man who had caused the arrest, being uncovered by any weapon, hissed, as he drew a pistol:

"I brand you as the murderer of Joe Allan—and you must die!" and aiming at his head he pulled the trigger.

Ernest dodged, and the bullet passed harmlessly over his head.

"That's my brand," he replied, returning the shot, and the next moment they were all engaged in a lively fusillade of firearms.

"To the door—to the door!" cried Ernest; and Charlie sprang forward, turned the key, which was still in the lock, threw the door open and dashed out on the street, followed by Ernest.

Fear lent wings to their feet, and they sped down to Broome and along towards Broadway, as if life depended on speed. They were not pursued, a fact they soon discovered, and more leisurely wended their way homewards.

CHAPTER IV.

A TERRIBLE DEED—INNOCENCE BRANDED.

"COME away, quick! He's coming!"

"Did he get the letter?"

"Yes. I saw him open and read it, and then go up stairs. He came down a moment later with his overcoat and cane."

"Then we have no time to lose. We must be there ahead of him. Come on."

Two men turned and left the Fifth Avenue Hotel, entering a carriage on the corner below, and were driven down Broadway at a rapid pace. A few minutes later an old man, whose silver hair and kindly face commanded respect everywhere, likewise entered a carriage, and was driven down Broadway.

"Who can it be?" he muttered, fumbling a piece of white paper nervously between his fingers.

"The handwriting is strangely familiar, and yet I cannot imagine who wrote it. But I could never refuse such a call as this."

The note referred to was one he had just received at the desk of the hotel clerk, and read:

"MR. HOPKINS: An old friend of yours is dying at No. — Crosby street, who wishes to see you before she breathes her last. Come immediately. In haste,
ANNIE B."

The carriage whirled rapidly down Broadway, the kind-hearted old man urging the driver to go faster.

"What number, boss?" the driver asked, as he turned into Crosby street.

"No. —," replied the old gentleman. "Is this Crosby street?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be quick, then, and I'll give you an extra dollar."

Two blocks more, and the carriage stopped before an old frame house. Only one window showed a light, and that was on the second floor.

"Wait for me," said the old gentleman, alighting from the carriage, and rapping on the door of the house.

The door was opened by a man, who asked, in a low tone of voice:

"Are you Mr. Hopkins?"

"Yes," replied the old gentleman; "I was sent for to see a—"

"Yes, sir; walk right up stairs," interrupted the man; "and step lightly, if you please."

"Lord bless me, yes, of course," muttered the tender-hearted man, softly climbing the narrow flight of stairs.

But ere he reached the top of the stairs the man at the bottom stepped outside, handed the driver a five-dollar bill, and said:

"Mr. Hopkins says you need not wait for him, but call for him at about eleven o'clock."

"All right, boss," replied the driver, mounting to his seat and driving off.

Just ten minutes after the carriage drove away, two young men might have been seen walking rapidly down the street in the direction of the old frame house, both wearing their hats well down on their noses, and the collars of their overcoats up about their heads, as if they partly sought to avoid recognition.

When they arrived opposite the old house they stopped, and looked carefully for the number.

"This must be the place, Charlie," said one of the young men, stepping under the gaslight, and looking at a tiny note which he carried in his hand.

As he unfolded it, a delicate, yet delicious odor pervaded the air.

"Are you sure of it, Ernest?"

"Yes—No.—Crosby street," replied Ernest Howland—for they were no other than our two heroes. "That's the house across the way over there."

"I don't half like the looks of that house, Ernest."

"Hang the house when she is inside! Come on. I see a light at the window!" and leading the way, Ernest Howland went across the street, followed by Charles Linton, his boon companion.

Ernest's raps on the door were answered by the same man who had admitted the silver-haired old gentleman a few minutes before.

"Mr. Howland?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Ernest.

"The lady is waiting for you in the second room back—walk right up, sir."

Ernest bounded up the narrow stairs, which were lighted by a small lamp sitting on an old stool at the head of the flight, followed by Charlie. The man below slipped out of the door, closed and locked it, and ran off up the street.

"Murder!" cried a voice in the rear room of the house, which was followed by a groan and a fall.

"Ernest!" whispered Charlie, in low, excited tones, "there's foul play going on here—let's go away."

"By Heavens, Charlie, it may be her!" cried Ernest, bursting open the door of the room in which they heard the cry: "Come on, quick. My God! Look there!"

On the floor in front of them lay the old, white-haired man, Josiah Hopkins, weltering in his blood, gasping in the last agonies of death. Not another being was in sight.

"A foul murder, as I live!" exclaimed Charlie, kneeling by the side of the dying victim.

"He's yet alive!" said Ernest, as the old man gasped, and gave a convulsive shudder. "Tell us, sir, if you can speak, who did this thing, and—ah, he's dead!"

"Lord, what a horrible spectacle!" cried Charlie, gazing down at the pale face of the dead man.

"Yes, it's terrible, and we must inform the police," said Ernest. "Look! There's a dagger driven to the hilt in his breast!"

Charlie shuddered.

"Look in his pockets for something that will tell who he is," said Ernest, stooping and pulling the dagger from the wound.

The crimson gore dripped from the weapon, as Ernest held it up and looked at it, while Charlie searched the pockets for letters or articles that would identify the murdered man.

"Ah, here's a package of letters, and a wallet that may—"

"There! Somebody is coming, thank God!" said Ernest, as footsteps were heard rapidly ascending the stairs. The next moment a burly policeman stood in the door, gazing horror-stricken at the scene. Ernest was standing over the dead body with the dripping dagger in his hand, while Charlie was kneeling by his side, with the wallet and package of letters in his grasp.

"Surrender, or you are dead men!" hissed the policeman, suddenly presenting a cocked revolver at them.

"My God!" ejaculated Charlie, dropping the wallet and letters and bounding to his feet.

"We are lost, Ernest!"

"We are innocent!" gasped Ernest, the bloody dagger dropping from his nerveless grasp, the point sticking in the floor and remaining in that position.

"I haven't the least doubt of it," said the officer, as several others, who had heard the cry of murder, rushed up the narrow flight of stairs, peering in at the door at the tableau within.

"Do you surrender?" demanded the officer.

"Yes," replied Ernest, his face as white as a sheet.

"Lost—lost!" moaned Charlie Linton. "Oh, I didn't want to come, Ernest, I was afraid something would happen, and now they will think that we killed him!"

"Officer," said Ernest, "this is a job that has been put up on us. We came here in response to this note, which you can read for yourself."

"Keep it yourself," replied the officer, "I have no discretion in the matter. I will take you to the station house."

"What's the matter? Clear the way there!" cried two or three policemen at the foot of the stairs, who had come to the place as the news of the murder flew along the street. They clubbed their way to the top of the stairs and joined the first policeman.

"A murder of the most fiendish kind," said the arresting officer. "One of you help me run 'em in, and the other stay here till we come back with orders."

"Come, sir!" said an officer, sternly, laying a heavy hand on Ernest Howland's shoulder, and leading him away. Linton groaned as if in agony of pain as another officer led him.

"Hi-hi-hi!" cried a voice in the crowd, which had so quickly assembled before the door of the old house, as the prisoners emerged upon the street. "Look at the murderers! There they go!"

"Oh! won't they swing for it!"

"What bloody wretches they are!"

"Rig'ler born murderers, begorra!"

"They'll dance on nothing, the bloody thaves!"

Through this running shower of comment our two heroes, pale, trembling and silent, were led away towards the nearest station-house, followed by a motley throng of men, women and children, anxious to get a glimpse of two men who had imbrued their hands in human blood. On the way, neither Ernest nor Charlie spoke a word. They were both stunned by the sudden trap that had been sprung upon them, and knowing how guilty appearances were believed, could see little hope of extricating themselves from it.

"What's these men been up to?" asked the captain of police at the station house, when they were marched up to the record desk.

"Murder, sir," promptly replied the officer.

"No!" gasped Ernest, with a start as if stung.

"Before high Heaven, we are both innocent!"

"Yes—yes!" hoarsely whispered Charles Linton, his pallid face betraying the intensity of his feelings. "We are innocent—we are innocent!"

"What do you know about it, Simmons?" the captain asked of the arresting officer.

"I was on the corner of the street above, sir," replied the policeman, "and thought I heard the cry of murder. The next moment a man came running up to me, saying a murder was being committed at No. — Crosby street. I ran down

there, rushed up the open stairway, and found this man"—pointing to Ernest Howland—"standing over an old man lying dead on the floor, with this bloody dagger in his hand; and this man"—pointing to Charlie—"was down on his knees searching the dead man's pockets, having this wallet and package in his hand."

"That looks like a pretty plain case," said the captain, making a record on the book before him. "Put them in cells number 12 and 13. Sergeant—but hold on; what's their names?"

"Ernest Howland," replied Ernest, promptly.

"And you, sir?" turning to Charlie Linton.

"Charles Linton, salesman at Henry Morgan's, in Grand street. We both reside at No. — Thirty-fourth street."

The captain completed the record, nodded his head to the sergeant, who led them off to numbers 12 and 13.

"In with you!" he said to Ernest, as he opened the heavy iron door. Ernest stepped inside, and the door closed upon him with a clang that sent a chill of horror through his soul.

CHAPTER V.

BEHIND THE PRISON BARS.

OF course the morning papers the next day teemed with flaming head lines, giving long descriptions of the terrible murder in Crosby street, the names of the murderers as Ernest Howland and Charles Linton, and the victim Josiah Hopkins.

The most astonished man in all the city, when he read the startling news at his breakfast table, was Henry Morgan, the great dry goods merchant on Grand street, in whose store Howland and Linton had been the most trusted salesmen for two or three years.

"What!" he yelled, springing to his feet and holding the paper at arm's length, as he stared like a madman at the flaming head-lines. "Ernest Howland and Charles Linton, murderers! Good Heaven! Caught in the act of robbing the body of the man they had killed! Never—never, I won't believe it!" and the merchant sank back in his chair, dazed and stunned by the news.

But he remained there but a moment. Dashing aside the paper, he sprang to his feet again, seized hat, cane and overcoat, and left the house as though it was on fire.

Calling a carriage, he was driven furiously to the station-house, where he gave his name and address, and demanded to see the prisoners.

He was permitted to see them.

"Ernest, my boy!" he exclaimed, grasping the hand of the unfortunate salesman, "how's this? Tell me truly—is it true?"

"It's not true that we are guilty, Mr. Morgan; but true that the old man was murdered by somebody just as we reached the house. We heard the cry of murder, the fall and groans, and rushed into the room, to find him lying on the floor with a dagger plunged to the hilt in his heart. He died in less than a minute after we found him. I pulled out the dagger, and Charlie looked for papers about him—for papers that would reveal who he was, when a policeman came up and arrested us."

"Ernest, my boy, tell me how you and Charlie came to go to such a place?" asked the merchant, the tears trickling down his face.

"We went there in response to that note; read it," said Ernest, handing him a note of tinted paper deliciously perfumed. Mr. Morgan took the note and stepped out into the corridor to read it. It read as follows:

"MR. ERNEST HOWLAND: If you will call at No. — Crosby street, at precisely nine o'clock to-night, you will meet the lady to whom you rendered such gallant service at the masquerade. She desires to thank you in person, and convince you of her gratitude. Bring your kind friend with you, and oblige

"Your 'Evening Star' friend,
EUGENIA."

"Ah, I understand it all now," said Mr. Morgan. "This was simply a decoy to get you into the trap."

"Read these notes, sir, and observe the dates of them," said Ernest, handing him the two notes he had received from unknown parties, offering him and Charlie ten thousand dollars each to leave the city.

"Good Heavens, Ernest!" exclaimed the merchant, "why didn't you let me know about this thing sooner?"

"I didn't think it worth your time, sir."

"The devil! Did they send you the money?"

"Yes, sir."

"Heavens! What did you do with it?"

"In our trunks at our boarding-house."

"Give me an order at once on your landlady,

to permit me to take charge of your effects on payment of what you owe her."

"I don't owe her anything, sir—neither does Charlie."

"Very well—now, on your life, don't say a word about that money until I tell you. I will see Charlie and warn him, so he will be on his guard. My lawyer will be here to see you—tell him everything as you have me, and I'll stand by you to the end."

With the order for Ernest's trunk in his possession, the merchant left him and went into No. 13 to see Charlie. Charlie was both glad and surprised to see him. He corroborated Ernest Howland's story in every particular, and gave his employer a similar order for his trunk that Ernest had given. Giving the unfortunate young man a few words of encouragement, Mr. Morgan hastened to the boarding-house on Thirty-fourth street, secured the trunks, carried them to his own residence, and found the money, just as the two young men said he would.

"It may be the means of saving them," muttered the merchant, "though I must confess that I don't know how. They've been caught in a nicely spread net, and it seems that nothing short of a miracle can save them."

True to his promise, the merchant sent his lawyer to see the two young men, who talked for an hour with them.

"Mr. Howland," he said, after he had heard the story, "I believe you are innocent, but it will be difficult to make a jury believe it. Appearances are against you and Linton, and unless we can absolutely prove, by creditable witnesses, the truth of your story, it will go hard with you."

"But if we cannot prove it, what then?" asked Ernest, in a hoarse whisper.

"Under the gallows!" replied the lawyer, in low, measured tones, as if weighing every syllable before uttering them.

At this every particle of color left Ernest Howland's face, leaving him as white and rigid as marble.

"I tell you the worst that can happen," said the lawyer: "but we will work to bring about a different result. We know not who your enemies are, but they may be compelled to show their hands before the trial comes off. You don't know the lady whose name was signed to the note you received?"

"No, sir. I met her at the masquerade, but never saw her face."

"Then we must find her out, and see what she knows," said the lawyer, rising to leave. "Keep up a good heart, and all will be well yet."

"Oh, this is terrible!" groaned Ernest, as soon as he was left alone with his busy thoughts. "My good name crushed at a single blow, branded as a murderer, and to be tried for my life! Death would be preferable—yes, a thousand times more than this! Branded as a murderer! My God! It seems like a hideous dream!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE VEILED WOMAN WALKS IN, AND ERNEST HOWLAND WALKS OUT OF THE TOMBS.

LATER in the day the lawyer returned to the station house to inform Ernest and Charlie of the decision of the coroner's inquest on the body of Josiah Hopkins.

"It was to have been expected under the circumstances," he said, "but will have no bearing whatever on your trial. You will be removed to the Tombs this afternoon, and to-morrow we will make application for bail."

"If I could get out on bail, I feel that I could unravel this mystery and bring the real murderers to the gallows."

"I think we can manage to get you out on bail," said the lawyer.

But he was mistaken.

So clear and positive was the testimony of the policeman who arrested them, and the position in which he found them, that the judge refused bail, committing them to jail to await the action of the grand jury.

"Charlie," said Ernest, grasping the manacled hand of his friend just before they were parted to be conducted to their respective cells in the dismal Tombs, "if the worst comes, we will die like men; but being innocent, let us swear before Heaven to stand by each other to the last, through our friends, if we cannot by ourselves."

"There's my hand on it, Ernest," said Charlie, clasping the manacled hand of Howland; "I swear by my soul and hope of Heaven."

"Humph!" grunted the deputy sheriff, who had them in charge. "I'd like to know what good you can do for each other now?"

"Put yourself in our place and you would know," replied Ernest, quickly.

"Excuse me, I'd rather not," and the deputy smiled complacently as he turned them over to the warden of the prison.

"In with you," said the warden, throwing open one of the cell doors, and motioning Ernest to enter.

"Cannot we both occupy the one room?" Charlie asked.

"No," was the gruff reply. "It's against the rules."

"Good-by, then, Charlie," said Ernest, again grasping the hand of his friend and wringing it affectionately.

"Good-by, Ernest; remember your oath with me," replied Charlie, choking with emotion.

The door closed with a dull, heavy thud that seemed to sound the knell of hope. Ernest threw himself down on the little cot, and gave way to a train of gloomy thoughts.

"Is it possible?" he asked himself a dozen times, "that an innocent man can be doomed to death by a process of law in this country? Yet everybody believes me guilty. Oh, if I can only fathom this veil of mystery and know who they are that thus hound me towards an awful death, it would not be so hard. That mysterious white cross is at the bottom of it, but who are they? Where are they? Would to God that I had left the country, as they ordered. But I never dreamed of this. Such devilish ingenuity. To murder an old man simply to have two others entrapped as his murderers is the superlative triumph of diabolism. Poor Charlie. For being my friend he is now almost under the gallows, and must suffer under this cruel charge as I do!"

The long night passed away in the Tombs, and the two prisoners in solitary confinement, counted the weary hours as they struck. They could not commune save with their own gloomy thoughts. Slowly yet surely the fatal coil of the mysterious conspirators were closing about them, and they were powerless to prevent it.

As the day was wearing away, the warden suddenly opened the door of Howland's cell and announced:

"A lady to see you, sir."

Ernest sprang to his feet in amazement as a handsomely-dressed lady entered the cell. The warden turned away to attend to other duties, leaving them alone together.

"Are you Ernest Howland?" the lady asked, without once raising her veil, through which she gazed at him with an interest she did not attempt to conceal.

"Yes, and you—you are—"

"The Evening Star of that fatal masquerade," she replied, interrupting him, taking a seat on the only stool in the cell.

"Thanks—a thousand thanks!" exclaimed Ernest, his face flushing with gratification.

"You are so kind to visit me in prison!"

"I could not rest until I had made up my mind to do so," she replied, "for I have read everything in the papers about the murder at the masquerade, and the attempts to get you to leave the city. But when that cruel note was published, which led you and your friend to that fatal spot, I could no longer restrain myself—"

"You do not believe us guilty, then?"

"No, oh, no! I know you are innocent; but alas, I cannot prove it in the courts. It is all because of your interference in my behalf at the masquerade, and the changing of that white cross that led to the death of Allan. They hope to get you out of the way and thus save Perry, and at the same time gratify their revengeful feelings. But we can't prove this, and—"

"Heavens, fair lady!" exclaimed Ernest; "you have given utterance to the thoughts that have been turning in my brain these two days!"

"Then you understand it as well as I do," she replied.

"Yes—yes; but who was Mercury that night?"

"Ah! I know not. I am rich, and would give thousands to know, for your sake as well as my own: for he is at the bottom of it all."

"Yes—yes; we owe all this trouble to him. The really guilty ones are free, and the innocent in prison."

"But I have come to enable you to turn the tables on them, Ernest Howland, and to set you free."

"How! What mean you?" exclaimed Ernest, in dumbfounded amazement.

She rose up, and cautiously closed the door of the cell, and whispered:

"You must change clothes with me, and—"

"Good Heavens!" gasped Ernest, interrupting her: "I cannot—will not do it!"

"But you must," said she, raising her veil, now that the twilight in the cell would sufficiently

veil her features; "now that I am here, I will not leave this cell again. I have made every preparation for success, and—"

"No—no! I cannot think of it!" he protested again.

"Listen to reason, Ernest Howland. No harm would come to me, and you are now almost under the gallows. If you escape, you may be able to obtain proof of your innocence, find out who Mercury was—for which I would be willing to suffer any amount of punishment. There is no one who can or will do this for you, as nearly everybody believes you guilty."

"But you, my friend," said Ernest. "I am a stranger to you—you have never seen my face until now. Why should you risk your life and reputation for me in—"

"Neither my life nor my reputation will suffer," she replied, "for I have made recognition impossible by my friends. I've cut off my hair like a man's, dyed myself all over until I am the color of an octoroon, broken off a front tooth, and will talk slang like a saucy shop girl, so that—"

"Stop—stop!" interrupted Ernest, laughing; "that's enough—any more would forever destroy my ideal Evening Star. Have you really done all this for my sake?"

"Indeed I have, and after so much trouble I don't intend to be cheated out of having my way either."

"But what will you do when they find it out?" he asked.

"Do? Why, laugh at them, of course, and tell them to hang me instead of you. You saved me from a fate worse than death, Ernest Howland, and I am going to show you my appreciation of it."

"Believe me, fair lady, I cannot gain my—"

"Hush! Not another word; I won't listen to it. Pull off that coat and vest."

Ernest slowly began to pull off his coat and vest, while the lady took off the jaunty hat, veil and superabundant curls that she wore, and deposited them on the floor in a corner.

Ernest strained his eyes in trying to get a glimpse at her face, so anxious was he to see her; but the darkness of the cell, with the closed door, rendered it impossible for him to trace her features.

He could see that she was both young and beautiful, however, and that was a wealth of satisfaction to him.

"What a pity they can't give us separate dressing-rooms," she whispered.

Ernest laughed.

"I'll shut my eyes," he said.

"Do so; but hurry up!"

"Well, ain't you going to shut yours?" he asked, retreating to the other corner of the room.

"Oh, Lord, I forgot!" laughed she, retreating to the other corner. "We both go it blind—but hurry up—pitch your clothes over here, please."

"Throw me yours, then," and tossing his pants, coat and vest towards her, he waited, in suspense, for the garments he was to flourish in.

"Have you got both eyes shut?" she asked, laughing all the time.

"Hermetically sealed."

She got into his clothes in a hurry—they were near about the same height, he being an inch or two the taller—and threw hers toward him.

"I'm blessed if I know which to put on first," he said, taking up the clothes and laying them on the bed—the little cot.

"This one first, that next, then this, the corset next, and then the dress. How strange it is that men continue to be ignorant about women's dress."

"Hang n e if I can tell which is which here!"

"Where?"

"Why, I've got into something I can't manage—oh, all right now! Now for the corset."

"I'll lace that up for you," and crossing over to his side, she drew the strings with such force as to make him gasp.

"Ugh—oh—goodness—let me out a mile or two!"

"Too tight, eh?"

"Yes; do you ever lace that tight?"

"Yes—that's nothing," she laughed, unloosing the strings.

"Well, you like squeezing better than I do."

"Oh, the girls all like to be squeezed—like lemons—there now. Put on the dress."

The dress was soon on him, and fitted first-rate.

"Now sit down on this stool," she said, "and I will fix up your hair for you. And while about it, I'll you what you must do when you get out. Go direct to No. — Seventeenth street, give three distinct raps on the door. You will be ad-

mitted by an old man, who will tell you what to do next. You can trust him in everything. Now you are a really handsome lady—sweet enough to eat."

Ernest rose up and surveyed himself by the light that came through the door, which she had now partially opened.

"No one will suspect you," she whispered; "go now—the warden is coming!"

"Your name—"

"Eugenia—that's enough!"

The warden opened the door and said:

"Time's up, ma'am."

"I'm ready, thanks, good-by, Ernest; keep up your spirits," said Ernest, imitating her voice with surprising accuracy, as he turned and followed the warden out of the cell.

The next minute he was out on the street, having passed out unsuspected by any one connected with the gloomy prison. He looked up and down the street at the hurrying throng, the veil closely drawn over his face, and could scarcely believe his senses.

"Free—free!" he muttered, and then quickly walked towards the corner to hail an approaching street car.

CHAPTER VII.

FLIRTING UNDER THE GALLOWS.

THE reader may well imagine the nervous state of Ernest Howland's feelings as he hailed a street car. It was late in the afternoon, and the car was crowded with up town residents.

"Maybe somebody will offer me a seat," he muttered, as he gathered the skirts of the handsome silk dress about his feet, and stepped into the car.

Two gentlemen sprang up, and tendered their seats. He bowed in recognition of the courtesy, and took one of the proffered seats, glancing around at the passengers as if in search of a familiar face. Two or three blocks passed, and the driver rang for fares. Several turned and looked towards him.

Ernest comprehended the situation at a glance. He had not thought about the fare, and now he knew he had not a cent with him.

"I'll be a distressed young lady, and lose my pocketbook," he said to himself, as he commenced a vigorous search for a pocket in the dress.

Where the pocket was he hadn't the least idea, and pretended to be very nervous and excited.

"Why, I believe I've lost my *portmonnaie*," he remarked, in a well-assumed voice, loud enough for those near him to hear, still searching among the mysteries of the fashionable dress for the pocket. If he could only find that pocket, how well he could play the game. But like the Irishman's flea, it wasn't there where he thought it was.

"Hanged if it don't give me away," he muttered, as he fumbled about on the right and on the left. The men were amused, and the ladies not a little surprised at the actions of such a well dressed woman.

"Perhaps you have lost your pocket, too," remarked a vinegar-faced old maid by her side, "as you don't seem to have one."

"Have you got it, ma'am?" he asked, with an innocent look and tone.

"Oh, Lord, did I ever!" gasped the horror-stricken old maid.

"Here it is, ma'am," said a little ten-year-old girl, who was standing in front of her with an old faded shawl on her shoulders and a small basket in her hand, lifting a fold in the dress and displaying the daintily worked pocket he was in search of.

"Thank you; I'm nervous; thought I'd lost my purse," said Ernest, drawing a beautifully wrought pocketbook from the pocket, and opening it, found it full of bills, with a few pieces of silver. He passed up a nickel, coolly took out a two dollar bill, handed it to the girl, saying:

"Politeness and a kind heart will always have friends—there's a present for you."

The little girl was astonished, of course, and thanked him with a grateful smile. The men looked pleased, and compliments on the veiled lady went around the car, to the disgust of the vinegar-faced old maid, who turned and looked another way all the way up to Broadway, where she got out.

At South Fifth avenue Ernest left the car and proceeded to walk up to Seventeenth street. He felt entirely safe from danger now, as he was nearly a mile from the Tombs. Quite a number of men were lounging about the street, ogling the ladies as they passed, some even bowing and smiling at those whose eyes they could catch.

"I'll get up a flirtation with one of them, just

for fun," said Ernest, laughing to himself, "and see how far he will follow me."

Passing a corner where several men were standing, he accidentally dropped his handkerchief. One of the men sprang forward, picked it up and hastened after him with it. Doffing his hat and bowing like a French dancing master, he presented the handkerchief with:

"I beg pardon, lady, but you dropped your handkerchief—allow me to present it to you!"

"Ah! Thank you, sir. How kind of you!"

"I am glad I was able to do you the slight service, ma'am," said the man, walking along by his side. "It might have been lost."

"Certainly—I don't know what we ladies would do if the gentlemen were not so attentive and polite. I dropped my bustle on Broadway once and—"

"Your bustle!" ejaculated the man, stretching his eyes as wide as saucers.

"Yes," continued Ernest, "and a young man picked it up, ran after me nearly half a block, and put it into my hand just as I was about to enter Stewart's store, saying:

"There, mum, you dropped your thingumbob!" and then hurried away before I could thank him—now wasn't he a good young man?"

"He was certainly a modest young man," said the man, laughing heartily.

"Oh, as for that, I blushed like a rose too, but I couldn't help myself. Accidents will happen, they say, in the best regulated families."

"But you ain't a family," said the man, smiling at the oddity of the elegantly dressed lady.

"No," replied the bogus lady, "but I was born in a family, which is all the same, isn't it?"

"I suppose so, if you count them that way."

"I was one of the family, anyway you count it—at least I always thought I was, anyhow."

"By George!" thought the man, "she's a green leaf from the fig tree, stylish as cut-glass; but, oh, my, ain't she fresh! Hanged if I wouldn't like to see her face, though," and then to draw her out, asked:

"Is there a large family of you?"

"Not now. I'm the only child left, and I'm papa's darling with a million dollars, though he does get mad at me because I go to masquerades, balls and theaters. I don't see any harm in them, do you?"

"Oh, no, of course not. On the contrary, I think they are very nice."

"So do I. I went to the big masquerade at the Academy of Music, and a horrid man came very near running away with me, and would, if a young man hadn't interfered."

"What character did you represent?" the man asked, with startled interest.

"The Evening Star; and it all got into the papers the next day, all because somebody got killed. Oh, it was awfully mixed up. I've just been down to the Tombs to see Mr. Howland, the young man who saved me that night, and I just think he's splendid!"

The man seemed utterly astounded, and gazed at the veiled Ernest wore, as if he would tear it away to see the face.

"What!" he continued, "are you the beautiful Evening Star who created such a sensation that night?"

"Yes, I am the 'Evening Star,'" giving a coquettish shake of the curls; "were you there?"

"Yes, and saw everything," he replied, not a little excited, "and would give the world to make the acquaintance of the Evening Star. My name is Edward Grady—there is my card."

"Thank you, sir, but I can't give you my name nor show you my face, because I don't want it to get into the papers."

"I will keep it a profound secret, and—"

"Mr. Howland begged me ever so hard in the Tombs this afternoon for the same thing, but I wouldn't do it."

"Oh, he's a murderer—I don't blame you for—"

"A murderer! He's as innocent as I am, and it was all a put up job on him and his friend to get them out of the way. I know enough to know that, and I'm going to know more about it before the trial comes off."

"You are interested in him, then?"

"Of course, why shouldn't I be?"

"Of course," echoed the man Grady.

By this time they had reached Union Square, and Ernest thought he had carried the joke far enough.

"We must part here," he said, stopping at Fourteenth street; "my father would be angry with me for talking to a stranger on the street—good-day, sir."

Before the man could say anything, he ran across the street, in front of a passing horsecar, and joined the great throng of promenaders,

hurrying along toward Seventeenth street, muttering:

"If that man doesn't know something about this thing, he's strangely interested in the case. But it's dangerous for me to wear this apparel on the street, and I'm going to get it off as quick as I can. This is Seventeenth street. No.—is further down, in the next block."

Hurrying down the street, he passed Sixth avenue, and then scanned the numbers very closely.

"Here it is," he muttered, running up the steps of a high stoop, brown-stone-front house, and giving three distinct raps on the door instead of ringing the bell.

The door was immediately opened by an old man in a faded dressing-gown, with a long white beard covering his breast.

Just as he stepped on the threshold, Ernest cast his eye up the street and saw Edward Grady slowly strolling along, watching his movements.

"Come in!" said the old man, rather impatiently.

"I am followed by a man," said Ernest, looking back at Grady, who was staring at the house.

"Are you suspected?" the old man asked.

"No; he thinks I am a woman, because I flirted with him on the street."

The old man chuckled.

"Flirting under the gallows; you ought to be a woman; ha-ha-ha!" and closing the door, the old man led the way into a rear room where a lamp was burning on a table.

CHAPTER VIII.

ERNEST CHANGES HIS SKIN AND WRITES ANOTHER NAME.

MOTIONING Ernest to a seat, the old man asked:

"Did you meet with any trouble in getting away?"

"No, sir. I walked right out with as much ease as she walked in. I didn't want to get out that way, sir, but she wouldn't listen to a refusal—I had to come."

"Of course—of course," said the old man. "She will have her way. Here, come into this bath-room, get out of those clothes, jump into this bath-tub, and bathe yourself thoroughly."

"I can assure you, I am glad of the chance to do so," said Ernest, proceeding to lay off the feminine garb he wore.

As he threw off the cloak, something attracted his attention, and picking it up again to examine it, he was thunderstruck on seeing a small, well-defined white cross on the right shoulder, marked with chalk.

"Good Heavens!" he gasped; "that fatal mark again!"

"Eh! what is it?" asked the old man, who had been busy turning on the hot and cold water.

"See there!" exclaimed Ernest, pointing to the white cross on the cloak. "It's the mark of death. How did it get there? It was not there when I put it on!"

"Then you have been recognized by some one of your enemies?" said the old man.

"No—no; but simply as the mysterious veiled lady. Ah! I have it!" cried Ernest, with a start. "That man who followed me, and with whom I flirted on the street, seemed startled when I told him I had been to see Howland in the Tombs. He put it there. He is one of those fiends. I have his address, and will keep track of him. Oh! for the power of transforming one's self into another being!"

As Ernest continued disrobing, the old man turned his back, talking the while, and poured a small bottle full of a whitish liquid into the bath tub, and then quickly concealed the bottle.

"The bath is ready," he announced, leaving the room.

Ernest plunged into the luxurious bath, and gave himself a thorough washing from head to foot. Before he was through the door opened, and the old man entered with a complete suit of masculine clothing, which he deposited on a chair, and then retired, taking the clothes Ernest had just laid aside.

After enjoying the bath as long as he wished, Ernest dried himself with towels and donned the clothes most suitable to his sex and taste. They fitted him handsomely, as though made to his measure. He came out and found the old man waiting for him by the table on which the lamp was burning. On another table near by a white linen cover concealed something underneath. The old man removed the cover, revealing a tempting supper for two.

"Ah!" said Ernest, "I am hungry, but I didn't know it."

"Help yourself, then."

After supper Ernest was told he had better retire and get a good night's rest, and in the morning he would receive instructions as to his future course. As he had slept but little during his two or three nights in the Tombs, he followed the advice of the old man and retired.

But sleep did not come to him so readily. He could not help thinking of the mysterious lady who was risking so much to save him.

"The world will applaud her and condemn me," he muttered to himself; "but that the world has already done. I am branded as a murderer. They will not harm her. But poor Charles!" and the generous-hearted young friend burst into tears at the certainty of the fate that menaced Charles Linton who was still pining in the Tombs. But at last he fell asleep to dream of the mysterious lady and her sacrifice for him. When he awoke the old man was standing by the side of his bed, gazing into his face with an air of satisfaction that puzzled him not a little.

"You had better get up now," the old man said, "you are out of danger now altogether."

"That's good news—the best I've heard in a long time," said Ernest, springing lightly out of bed, and proceeding to put on his socks.

A glimpse at his hands and feet startled him.

They were of a dark olive tinge.

"Great Africans!" he exclaimed, straightening up and glaring at himself in the full-length mirror opposite. "I'm a full-blown son of Ham!"

"Eh! what's that?"

"I'm a nigger—kick me out!"

The old man laughed.

"You are certainly a very good-looking brunette," he said, "and a very decided type at that."

"How in thunder did it happen, I'd like to know?"

"In the bath last night," the old man replied. "No one will know you now. You are almost as dark as an Indian, and your hair will rival the raven's wing in its shiny blackness."

"Yes, I don't think any one will know me," said Ernest; "but won't it wash off?"

"Try it and see."

Ernest bathed his face and hands, using soap quite freely, yet the dark olive tinge remained the same.

"I should call it a fast color, warranted not to fade," he remarked, looking at his hands.

"Once a nigger, always a nigger; but better a live nigger than a dead white man," and a heroic resolution to accept the inevitable flashed over him.

"The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots," said the old man; "but when the time comes, this phial emptied into your bath tub will restore you to your original color again."

Ernest took the phial and examined it minutely.

"Bathe in the water as I did last night?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Shall I keep this?"

"If you wish."

"Thank you," and he placed the bottle away in the breast pocket of the coat he had just donned.

"Now," said the old man, as soon as our hero was dressed, "here are weapons—pistols and knife, which, of course, you will have to carry. Here is a purse full of money. You are to claim to be a foreigner, speak with a slight foreign accent, and work day and night to unravel the mystery of this conspiracy against the lady now in the Tombs and yourself and friend."

"Good Heavens! Are they plotting against her, too?"

"Yes, and your interference brought the wrath and vengeance of the conspirators down upon your own head. You must now leave this house, go to a hotel, and whenever you want money, or have any information to give, come to me."

"Have you no clue to give me by which I may be guided in a measure?"

"None whatever," replied the old man. "Everything is wrapped in impenetrable mystery. You will have to work up the case the best way you can. You are the only one we can trust, as your own life is at stake."

"But the lady, who is she?"

"She is simply Eugenia—the veiled lady. When she thinks proper to do so, she will tell you all. But her name must remain unknown in this affair."

"Whoever she is, she has saved my life, and now my life shall be devoted to her service as long as she needs a friend."

"Yes—yes—she knows that," said the old man; "but you had better go now," and pushing him gently towards the door the old man opened it and Ernest passed out into the street.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DISCOVERY—THE WHITE CROSS AGAIN.

OUT on the street, Ernest looked up and down, as if taking a casual survey of the surroundings, and then started toward Broadway. He walked leisurely along, keeping his eyes open for any one he might know, and to see if he or his color were suspected. The first policeman he met was standing on the corner of Seventeenth street and Sixth avenue. The officer looked at him and passed on, as though he were one of the many thousands he met every day.

"Oh, I guess there's no danger," thought he, wending his way toward Broadway.

On that great thoroughfare he mingled with the thousands that surged along, seeing familiar faces here and there, but passing unnoticed by all. Going into a clothing store he purchased two extra suits of clothes, with underwear, ordered them to secure him a trunk, put them in it, and send it to the Hotel, giving the name of the hotel he found on the card the man Grady had given him the day before, when he was personating the veiled lady on Fifth avenue. He then went direct to the hotel, registered as Juan Gomez, and took an elegant room. Soon after his trunk arrived, and was sent up to his room.

When he came down from his room about noon, he was surprised to find Grady in conversation with another man, both apparently greatly excited.

"Here's yer extra News!" cried a newsboy, in the front door. "All about der escape of Howland from der Tombs!"

"Here," called Ernest, "give me one!" tossing a small coin to the boy, and taking a seat near the two men, where he leisurely unfolded the paper and glanced at the flaming capitals that preceded the story of the veiled woman and the romantic escape of Ernest Howland from the Tombs.

"That's her!" said Grady's companion, not a little excited. "She has deliberately put herself in his place that he might escape the gallows. She can no longer conceal her identity now, and the mystery will be solved."

"I tell you, Ryder, it isn't her," said Grady, "but another woman; for I met and talked with the veiled woman at four o'clock on Fifth avenue yesterday afternoon. She told me that she had been down to the Tombs to see him, and that she believed him guiltless of the murder."

"But are you certain it was the right one?"

"Yes. She said her father got mad every time she went to a theater or masquerade, and that she was the 'Evening Star' at the masquerade at the Academy of Music on the night of Allan's death, and that she had kept her identity a profound secret ever since to keep her name out of the papers."

"At four o'clock, did you say?"

"Yes."

"And the warden says Howland left the jail at a quarter past three in her clothes. By the immortal Jacobs, Grady, it must have been Howland himself!"

"Oh, Howland be hanged!" sneered Grady. "Palm a man off on me for a woman if you can."

"Where did she go? Why didn't you follow her?"

"I did. She went into a brown stone front, No.—Seventeenth street."

"Well, Howland is out and some woman is in his place. I'm going down to see if I can identify her," and then lowering his voice he uttered words that Ernest could not hear.

They both locked arms and strolled out of the hotel, leaving our hero to read his paper and think over what he had heard.

"By my soul!" he muttered, "those two men are in some way interested in the veiled lady if not in the other two. What the deuce does it mean? If I dared, I would go down to the Tombs with them and see what could be learned. But I am afraid to risk it."

Turning to the paper again, he read over the story once more, many points being greatly exaggerated, the whole reading like a first-class sensational romance.

"Thank God she is equal to the emergency!" inwardly ejaculated Ernest, as he read a description of her in the paper, and her shrewd answers to questions put to her.

The day passed, and Grady and his companion returned to the hotel, neither of them having

been able to identify the woman in the Tombs. She had been compelled to put on a dress in order to facilitate recognition, yet she still remained a mystery, laughing at the baffled officials. She was the theme of conversation everywhere, and at the Hotel nothing else was talked of during the afternoon and evening.

Ernest mingled with the throng that moved about in the office of the hotel, and watched for an opportunity to place the mysterious white cross on the shoulders of Grady and the man Ryder. He soon succeeded in doing so, and then quietly awaited developments.

He was not prepared for what followed. He had not thought that the public had come to regard that mysterious white cross as a fatal sign—a mark of doom—as in the case of the murdered Allan.

"My God!" hoarsely gasped a man in the throng, whose white, scared face attracted universal attention. "The white cross!—there's death in the house!"

"Where—where?" chorused a dozen excited men at once.

"There—look there!" replied the white-faced man, pointing to the mysterious mark on Grady's shoulder.

They looked around, and then sprang back as if he were a wild beast to be avoided, scrambling over each other in a wild, insane desire to get as far away from the doomed man as possible.

Grady stood in the center of the open space as if dazed, and unconscious of the meaning of all this rush from his side, as though he were a leper.

"The white—the white cross is on your back!" cried an excited man in the throng.

Grady turned deadly pale, and proceeded to draw off his coat.

"Good Lord!" gasped another, standing near the man Ryder. "There's another!" and breaking across the open space like a frightened deer, dashed through the open door out into the street.

Another and another followed in quick succession, and in another minute Ryder was himself an object of terrible interest to the excited throng about him.

He then knew the white cross had been mysteriously placed upon his back.

"Man or devil!" he exclaimed, flashing his bright bowie in the gaslight, "I defy you! do your worst!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed the dark-featured Gomez, with startling clearness; "murder will out!" and as he stood with folded arms gazing at the marked men, no one seemed to know where the voice came from. An awful silence fell upon the throng, during which men gazed into each other's white faces as though a voice from the dead had spoken. At last Ryder turned toward the door, and walked out upon the street without uttering a word, followed by Grady, and a minute later by the dark-hued Gomez.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEREIN THE WHITE CROSS AGAIN APPEARS AS A SENSATION.

RYDER and Grady were greatly demoralized, as they left the hotel, followed by our hero as Juan Gomez.

He overtook them near the middle of the next block.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, addressing them with a slight foreign accent, "but I was a witness of what occurred in the hotel a few minutes ago, and I—"

"What did you see, sir?" Ryder asked, quickly interrupting him, eying him from head to foot.

"I saw the architect who put up that white cross on your shoulders."

"You did!" exclaimed Grady, grasping his hand in a very affectionate manner.

"I did."

"You will point him out to us, if you are a friend, sir," said Ryder, his tone betraying his excitement, in spite of his effort to seem calm and collected.

"I can't say I am your friend, seeing we are total strangers to each other," replied Gomez, with an air of candor that at once disarmed suspicion; "but a fellow-feeling, they say, often makes us wondrous kind. I've been marked myself once, and know something of your situation, hence, when I saw that mark placed on your shoulders, I naturally looked at the man, and—"

"Who was he? What kind of a man was he?" cried both Ryder and Grady in chorus.

"He seemed to be a middle-aged man. His eyes flashed fire as he gently, yet quickly, made the mark."

Ryder and Grady looked at each other in mystified surprise.

"Who the devil can it be?" they asked.

"As he made the mark on your shoulder, sir," Gomez continued, turning to Ryder, "I heard him hiss:

"That for Josiah Hopkins!"

"Good God!" gasped Grady, starting as if stung, and turning ashen pale, while a death-like pallor overspread the face of Ryder.

The three men looked at each other in silence for nearly a minute. Gomez returned Ryder's gaze unflinchingly under the gaslight.

"You heard that?" Ryder asked, in a hard, cold voice.

"Yes."

"What else?"

"Nothing. He turned and walked away, as if to keep an engagement."

"Did he leave the house?"

"Yes. I then turned to see the effect of the strange mark, and was about to inform you of its being there, when some of your friends called your attention to it."

"I will give a thousand dollars to meet him!" hissed Ryder through his clenched teeth.

"I will charge you nothing, sir, to point him out to you if I see him again," replied Gomez, blandly. "I followed you out for the purpose of telling you what I have, thinking you would like to know it."

"Thank you, sir. You are kind. May I ask your name, sir?"

"Certainly. My name is Juan Gomez. I am stopping at the same house with you."

"Ah! We'll see you again, then. Come on, Grady."

But Grady seemed rooted to the spot. He didn't move an inch as his companion turned to leave. His face was livid, and his limbs seemed paralyzed.

"That for Josiah Hopkins!" he muttered, as if talking to himself, and then looking up at Gomez, asked: "Did he say that, sir?"

"Yes," and Gomez nodded affirmatively.

"Come on, Grady!" called Ryder, some ten paces distant.

"Good-evening, sir," and Gomez bowed profoundly, as he turned away to retrace his footsteps.

Grady stared after him until he had re-entered the hotel.

"What the devil do you mean by that scared look?" growled Ryder, going back to his companion and grasping him by the arm. "You'll give yourself away, and then there'll be h—l to pay!"

"I think we've got that to pay now," said Grady, his white face looking more like a dead man's than a live one.

"Yes; and that fellow believes we are in some way concerned in that old man's—"

"For God's sake hush—don't say it!" interrupted Grady, nervously.

"Hanged if I don't believe you are getting afraid of your shadow," said Ryder. "What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"Ryder," replied Grady, turning on his companion, "you know I never was afraid of any living man, but now, with this unknown Nemesis chalking up our backs, and not being able to tell him from friend or foe, I am nervous and uneasy. If I could spot him, I would follow him through fire and water—over land or sea, to meet him face to face."

"Well, I believe you would, Grady," said Ryder, taking the arm of his companion. "Come with me, and I'll tell you who I think it is."

"Who?"

"Ernest Howland," quietly replied Ryder, as they walked down Broadway.

"No!" exclaimed Grady; "that is impossible!"

"How so? He is out of jail."

"True, but he has had no time to spot us, for he does not even know us. No—no, that won't do. Howland is hundreds of miles away from here by this time."

"I am not so sure of that. I wish he was. But one thing is certain, some one either suspects us, or has positive knowledge of the whole thing. We've got to find out who it is, and put him out of the way."

"Yes, but how will we find out who he is?"

"By watching."

"But they may be watching us all the time."

"I hope they are, for then we will be able to spot 'em. Once spotted, they must follow in the wake of the old man."

"Yes—yes," muttered Grady, "there's no help for it. It's their necks or ours. I'd slay a thousand rather than die under the gallows."

"Of course; any man would," said Ryder. "That's our situation exactly. We understand what we have to do now. You keep your eye on me in the crowds in the hotel and elsewhere, and I'll watch for you. We'll soon catch some of them with their little chalk."

The two men turned and retraced their footsteps down Broadway, returning to their hotel in about an hour after leaving it. They found a still larger crowd there; the news that the now famous white cross had been seen there on two well-known gentlemen having created quite a sensation. The dark, handsome Gomez moved about in the throng listening to the theories and comments advanced, and uttered by scores of excited men. Never before had such a profound mystery and romance startled the metropolis.

"There's a woman at the bottom of it," said one.

"Of course—there always is," said another.

"It's the one in the Tombs."

"Who is she?"

"The mysterious veiled woman, of course."

"What do you think about it?" asked one of Gomez, just as Ryder and Grady re-entered the hotel.

"I hardly know, sir; but I'm looking every day to hear of another deed of blood, since Howland is now free, and—"

"Have you seen him, sir?" Grady asked, coming forward and interrupting him the moment he caught sight of him.

"No," said Gomez, "and I've been watching closely. I doubt whether he has returned, unless he came in after you did."

Gomez noticed that while Ryder kept aloof from him, he still cast furtive glances in his direction.

"Ryder suspects me," he said to himself. "I must throw him off the scent."

In a few moments he left the throng and went up to his room, where he took off his coat and made a white cross on the left shoulder with a piece of chalk. Putting it on again, he leisurely descended to the throng below, and mingled among the excited men.

"By Heavens!" exclaimed an excited old man, "there's the white cross again!"

"Where—where!" cried a dozen at once, Gomez among them.

"On your back, sir!" replied the man, turning excitedly to Gomez.

"The devil you say!" exclaimed Gomez, almost jumping out of his coat as a hundred excited men gathered around him. He gazed at the fatal mark in well-feigned horror. It seemed possessed of a fascination peculiar to itself, as they pressed forward eager to touch it with the tips of their fingers.

"Ah! You have it too!" said Ryder, pressing forward and grasping him by the hand.

"Yes, and simply because I said what I did to you, for I've been only two days in the city—a total stranger here," and Gomez returned the friendly grasp of the hand with equal warmth.

"You must have been watched," returned Ryder.

"Whoever the scoundrel is," called out Gomez, loud enough to be heard by all in the room, "I defy him, and from this hour I am his enemy to the death! No man shall put an assassin's mark on me with impunity!"

"Give me your hand on that, my friend," cried Grady, grasping Gomez's hand in both his.

Gomez put on his coat, and was regarded by some of the crowd as a doomed man; but his fearless bearing won him many friends in the crowd.

"They've put us in the same boat," said Ryder.

"Yes; and perhaps it would be better if we pulled together," added Gomez, locking arms with him, and strolling off towards the bar of the hotel. They drank wine together, and soon became fast friends, and parted at midnight, pledged to each other to stand or fall together in meeting the danger that menaced them.

How long he had slept he knew not, but Grady awoke with a start, finding breathing quite difficult. And no wonder! His head was in a bag of some kind of thick cloth, the cord of which was gathered uncomfortably tight about his neck.

"Oh—ugh—ah—what the devil is this?" he spluttered, tugging at the bag that enveloped his head.

"Keep still or you are a dead man!" whispered a hoarse voice in his ear, and the next moment he felt the cold muzzle of a revolver pressing against his head.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH GRADY WAKES UP WITH HIS HEAD IN A BAG, AND TELLS MURDER.

"Who—who are you?" gasped Grady, in terrified alarm.

"I am the white cross, and—and—"

"What?"

"Your executioner, unless you choose to buy your life!" replied the unknown.

"You will murder me?"

"I will kill you unless you—"

"Mur—"

A sudden jerk of the cord caused the mouth of the bag to contract around his throat with all the fierce power of a boa constrictor, cutting short the cry of murder with the first sound. Grady gasped, struggled wildly for breath, and then fell back helpless on the bed.

"You see how useless it is," came the hoarse voice again in his ear, as the cord was unloosened so he could breathe. "You are in the power of a victim of the white cross, who will compel those who first made it to wear it. Will you answer my questions?"

"No," replied Grady, feeling furtively under his pillow for his pistol.

"Then die the death of a dog!" hissed the unknown, drawing savagely at the cord again.

A terrific struggle for breath ensued.

Grady fell back exhausted.

"Will you answer now?" asked the unknown, relaxing the cord.

"Yes—for God's sake—take it off!"

"No—not until I am through with you. Now tell me, as you value your life, who killed Hopkins?"

Grady started as if stung.

"I don't know!" he replied.

The cord slowly contracted.

"Tell the truth, or you are a dead man!"

"I—ah—murd—!"

Quick as a lightning flash the cord contracted and cut short the cry. Another terrible gasping struggle for breath ensued, only to end in the victim falling back helpless on the bed.

"Who killed Hopkins?" was the question that saluted the terrified Grady, the moment the cord relaxed.

"Kemper."

"Who is Kemper?"

"That's all I know."

"Do you know it?"

"I heard so."

"You are lying," and the cord commenced contracting again. By a desperate effort Grady struck out, and released himself from the grasp of his unknown assailant, and then the cry of:

"Murder—murder!" rang out through the house in startling tones. Instantly the cry was taken up in other rooms, and along the corridors, and the sound of rushing feet were heard.

"Curses on the wretch!" hissed the hoarse voice of the unknown. "You are a doomed man if you don't clear Howland and Linton from that charge of murder! I will come again."

"Murder—murder!" yelled the terrified Grady, expecting each moment to feel that terrible cord tighter about his neck again.

The door was burst open, and a dozen guests of the hotel rushed into the room to find Grady lying on the floor, his head in a bag, and struggling to free himself from it.

"Murder! Help! Murder!" he continued to yell, rolling over and over on the floor in his desperation.

"Here—what's this?" cried Ryder, taking hold of him, and trying to get the bag off his head.

"Take it off—take it off!" screamed Grady, tugging frantically at his throat.

Ryder cut the cord with a knife, and the bag flew off in his hand.

"Where is he, the scoundrel?" exclaimed the enraged man, staring around at the eager faces before him.

"Who was it?" asked one.

"I don't know. I woke up with my head in a bag, and a man pulling at the cord," replied Grady, in a terrible state of excitement.

"Maybe it was a joke."

"Joke be hanged! I had to fight blindfolded for my life. The scoundrel said he was the white cross, and tried to murder me."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed several. "The white cross again!"

Ryder turned pale as death, and glanced wildly about him.

"Bring me a glass of brandy, quick!" Grady asked, and the order was sent below.

Grady drank the glass full of the fiery stuff, and turned to Ryder.

"I want to share your room with you until morning."

"Yes, of course, you are welcome," replied Ryder. "Come with me."

The crowd followed him to Ryder's door, and then left for their own quarters.

"Ryder," said Grady, the moment the door was closed, "we are doomed; they know who got away with the old man."

"No!" gasped Ryder, turning ashen-hued.

"Yes; I woke up with my head in that infernal bag, and somebody pulling at the string. I asked who it was. He placed the muzzle of a revolver against my temple, and whispered:

"The white cross—you are a dead man if you don't tell who killed Hopkins!"

Ryder sprang to his feet.

"That was Howland!"

Grady sprang up too.

"How do you know?"

"He has some clew, and is following it up."

What did you tell him?"

"I wouldn't tell him anything, and he drew that string until I fell back on the bed, choked almost to death. I then told him that Kemper did it."

"Kemper?"

"Yes; a myth, of course; but he wouldn't believe it and tried to choke me again. I got away from him and cried murder as loud as I could. A bitter curse escaped him as he heard people coming, and hissing: 'You are a doomed man if you don't clear Howland and Linton from the charge of murder—I will come again,' I heard him leave the room."

Ryder paced his room like a caged tiger.

"That infernal woman!" he hissed. "I would give my right hand to know if that is her at the Tombs. We must change our identities, Grady, or we'll be murdered some night."

"No, murder won't help them," said Grady. "The testimony of the policeman and others will hang Howland and Linton, and their conviction will save Joe Perry, for nobody will believe them. They are trying to find out who did kill Hopkins; that's what they want. To confess will be to bring us under the gallows. To resist, deny, and fight it out is our only salvation. I am satisfied on that point."

"You may be right," said Ryder, "but for safety we must remain together. You didn't see his face at all, did you?"

"No."

The two men then secured the door to their room with additional fastenings, and retired for the balance of the night.

The next morning they were horrified at finding two white crosses on their door.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN—THE PISTOL SHOTS ON THE DOCK.

JUAN GOMEZ was the first man to meet Ryder and Grady as they descended to the office of the hotel the next morning. He appeared nervous and greatly excited.

"It was a narrow escape you had, sir," he said to Grady.

"Yes, but it will be worse for him if he tries that on again," replied Grady. "Zounds, man! How would you like to have your head chucked into a bag and the strings drawn tight as a hangman's noose?"

"I would not like it, surely."

"Nor I, and I'm going to have it out with the scoundrel if we ever meet again."

"I'd like to give you a helping hand," said Gomez, "though I know nothing of your quarrel with this Knight of the White Cross."

"We have no quarrel with them," Ryder quickly replied, "though I suppose we have incurred their displeasure by reason of our friendship for Joe Perry, now in the Tombs, charged with killing Allen, his best friend."

"Meet me in the ladies' parlor in a half hour," whispered Grady to Ryder, as he turned to leave them, yet loud enough for Gomez to catch half the sentence.

"All right," whispered Ryder, in reply; and in a few minutes Gomez himself withdrew.

A half hour later Ryder and Grady entered the ladies' parlor, and stopped near one of the heavily curtained windows. It was too early for any of the ladies of the house to put in an appearance, hence they were in even more privacy than in their own rooms, as walls have ears they say.

"Well, what have you learned?" Ryder asked, in a low tone of voice.

"I've learned that Hopkins' nephew is in the city, employing some of the best detectives to trace out the mystery of that veiled woman, as he believes she had something to do with the murder, as well as the escape of Howland."

"Well, as long as they follow that trail I have no objection. It will not interfere with our plans to secure the acquittal of Joe Perry. We put up the job on the old man and the other two to save Perry, and it succeeded so far that Howland and Linton are bound to swing, and—"

Grady gave Ryder a sudden nudge with his elbow, his face white as a sheet as he pointed to the toe of a man's boot under the folds of the curtain that rested on the carpet. Ryder glanced down at the terrible discovery, and drew his pistol. Grady seized him by the arm and motioned towards the door. They both made a hasty exit from the room.

"By the eternal gods!" hissed Ryder, "that man must not live. He has heard too much. Watch the door, Grady!"

Grady went back into the room, and seated himself at the piano, drumming on the keys in a listless sort of way, keeping his eye on the window curtain. An hour passed, and still nothing moved.

Grady had evidently intended to remain all day, if necessary. But he was soon relieved.

A lady came into the room, and seeing him seated at the piano, went to the window, pulled aside the curtain, and uttering a slight scream hurried out of the room.

"Ah!" exclaimed Grady, aloud, "I wonder what frightened the lady! I will—the devil!"

"Ah, no; simply Juan Gomez!" said Gomez, bowing and smiling as he stepped from behind the curtain. "I was reading a private letter in a private place, when she came in. Some women would be frightened at their shadows at noonday were they to spy them suddenly, I do believe, and—what! Gone! By my soul! that ends my chances in that direction. It will be my time now to fear and tremble, act on the defensive, and wear the white cross. They will know it was premeditated!"

Juan Gomez sat down to the piano, and played two or three popular airs, and then strolled out of the parlor, went down to the office, and mingled with the crowd of eager people, who were discussing the attempt on the life of Grady, and the mysterious woman who remained unidentified in the Tombs.

He caught Ryder's eye, and saw there a flash of malicious hate and vengeance. He advanced towards him, but Ryder turned away, and Gomez moved on, as though he did not notice the slight. But the next moment Ryder turned and spoke to him.

"The white cross was around again this morning. He left his compliments on my door."

"Keep a bright lookout for him, and you'll get him yet."

"I think I have him spotted," replied Ryder, significantly, as he turned to shake hands with a friend.

During the day Gomez visited a shirt manufactory, where he ordered an undershirt made of one dozen thicknesses of fine silk, to be finished and sent to his address before evening. It was promptly made and sent, without any bill, it having been paid for in advance.

Gomez hastened to his room, and put it on under his linen shirt.

"Now, come on with your bullets," he muttered, as he put on his coat and started down the stairs again.

After supper Ryder invited Gomez to go to the theater with him. He accepted, and they went to Niblo's.

"Now for a glance at New York at midnight," said Ryder, as they pushed out with the throng.

"Where shall we see it?"

"In several places. You've heard of Harry Hill's place?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll take that in on our way—but first we'll go to the Oriental Nudities, and then—"

"I suppose you know about such places?" Gomez asked.

"Oh, yes; of course."

Gomez went over on the east side, along the Bowery to a certain narrow street, or alley, frequented by the worst of characters, into which they turned.

"This is certainly an uninviting place," said Gomez, after they had gone about two blocks through the dangerous locality.

"Very, indeed," replied his companion, "and many a foul deed has been committed hereabouts. But down by the river at the foot of this street you will see something you probably never saw before in your life."

"Then the sight is worth the trouble and danger?"

"Yes; quite a number of strangers go there out of curiosity. Ah, here we are. Did you know there were dance houses down under these wharves here—where the rats, river pirates—

men and women who live in defiance of law and order—mingle together in common?"

"No; I never dreamed of such a thing."

"Then come with me, and I will show you."

Ryder led the way toward the end of the wharf, followed by Gomez. Just as they reached the end of the pier Ryder wheeled, presented a revolver almost against Gomez's breast and fired. He staggered back, and two more shots rang out on the midnight air. Gomez reeled like a drunken man for a moment, and then stumbled headlong into the rushing current of the East river.

CHAPTER XIV.

"SO MUCH FOR THE SPY!"—TOM GREGG CATCHES A TARTAR.

THE reader will readily surmise that Gomez was not killed by the pistol shots of the treacherous Ryder. The silken shield he wore around him was bullet-proof, though the force of the balls gave him a stinging pain to each shot. The plunge into the river saved him from other shots that might be more effective, and caused Ryder to believe him dead, as the outgoing tide carried him swiftly out of sight.

"So much for the spy!" hissed the would-be murderer, gazing through the darkness, and listening for some sounds of a struggle in the water.

"He's got bullet holes enough in him to drown an elephant," he remarked, as he turned to leave the wharf.

"Hark—a watchman! I must not be seen, or all will be lost—good Heavens! I can't pass them—there are two of them—I must take to the water!"

The desperate man let himself down over the pier into the water, so as not to make a splash, holding on to the logs tenaciously.

"I tell yer, William," said one of the watchmen, "I heerd three shots an' seed the flash each time, an' somebody's been murdered—sure as shootin'!"

"Well, yer see, there ain't no one here now," said the other watchman, producing a dark-lantern, and casting a gleam of light about over the pier.

"No; there ain't nobody hyer," said the first watchman; "there was, though," and the two worthies slowly wended their way back towards more comfortable quarters.

"May the devil take the meddling fools," hissed Ryder, as he climbed up on the pier, dripping with water, almost cold enough to freeze. "They've made me take a bath that'll give me the cold shivers for a month."

Carefully watching right and left, he managed to creep away from the pier unperceived, and wended his way up towards the Bowery without meeting anyone who noticed his wet clothes.

Going into a small lodging house, he registered a fictitious name, and took a room, saying to the drowsy clerk that he had missed the ferryboat and fallen into the river.

The next morning he sent for a clothier, and ordered a suit of clothes sent up to him. He soon appeared on the street in another suit, and leisurely wended his way towards his hotel on Broadway.

Grady met him there, and a signal passed between them that told the story of the murder.

"Good!" exclaimed Grady. "That troublesome job is over with!"

"Yes, and a troublesome one it was, too."

"I feel better now—come, let's have a drink," and the two worthies adjourned to the bar-room to drink and make merry over the taking off of another of their foes.

A week passed, and the continued absence of Juan Gomez began to excite suspicions of foul play in some quarter. The landlord's bill remained unpaid, and the trunk in Gomez' room was locked up to satisfy it. The missing man was reported in the papers, and then the story of the mysterious white cross was revived with tenfold interest. He was put down as another victim of that fatal sign, and a thrill of horror ran through the great city at the bare mention of it.

One day an old man, whose long grey beard and silvered hair told of long years that had passed over his head, called at the hotel, paid Juan Gomez' bill, and demanded the trunk.

"Are you his father?" the landlord asked.

"His uncle," said the old man, shaking his head. "His parents are dead."

"Have you no idea as to his fate?"

"None, sir; have you?"

"Yes, I believe he has been foully murdered."

"Yes, of course—of course," muttered the old man, following the porter with the trunk. It was placed in a small express wagon, and the

old man got in on top of it, and was driven rapidly away.

"Follow that trunk, Grady," whispered Ryder.

Grady left the hotel, entered a carriage, and told the driver to keep that express wagon in sight.

"By Heavens, Ryder!" he said on returning, "the old man went into that house on Seventeenth street where that veiled woman went the other day."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"That's very strange. I am beginning to think it was the veiled woman you met, after all."

"I am more than ever satisfied of it, and I am going to set a watch on the house."

"That would not be a bad idea, Grady. Can you trust any one to do it?"

"Oh, yes, I know the man for the job."

"Then put him on duty at once."

Grady left the hotel, and was not seen again till nearly sunset, when he returned.

"Well?" asked Ryder.

"All right," returned Grady, which Ryder understood to mean that the house in Seventeenth street was watched. During the evening Grady told him that Tom Gregg, a desperate character whom he had employed once before, was watching the house.

"Can you trust him?"

"Yes, in any deed of deviltry."

"But don't give him any grip on us."

"Trust me for that."

At midnight a messenger called at the hotel, and asked for Mr. Grady. The clerk woke him up with:

"A messenger from — Hospital to see you."

Grady hastily dressed, and went down stairs.

"That is Mr. Grady, sir," said the clerk, indicating Grady as he descended the stairs.

"There is a man dying at the — Hospital, sir, who wants to see you right away," said the messenger, approaching him.

Grady looked incredulous, and smiled.

"A lame dodge," he thought; "a white cross trick to get me into their hands."

"Tell him to defer dying until to-morrow morning," he said, turning to the messenger, "and then I'll go with the greatest pleasure."

"But, sir," said the astonished messenger, "the man will be dead in an hour or two, and he says he must see you."

"Indeed!" sneered he; "who is it that is in such haste to get out of the world?"

"He says his name is Tom Gregg, and that you —"

"Tom Gregg!" almost screamed Grady, starting as if suddenly stung; "Tom Gregg dying!"

"Yes. He was brought in unconscious two hours ago; picked up on Seventeenth street," replied the messenger, "and he says you —"

"Yes—yes, I will go with you; just wait till I get my overcoat!" and Grady, greatly excited, hastened up to his room, called up Ryder, saying:

"Gregg has been murdered. He is dying in the — Hospital, and has sent for me."

"Don't believe a word of it," said Ryder. "It's a trick to catch you."

"It may be, and it may not. I dare not refuse to go, for if he is dying—he may make confessions it were well for me to prevent."

"Then I will go with you," said Ryder, springing out of bed and hastily donning his clothes. "These death-bed confessions play the deuce sometimes."

The two men, armed to the teeth, descended the stairs and followed the messenger out on the street.

"Hurry up," he said, "for we've lost much valuable time already."

They were soon at the — Hospital, where they were shown into a ward. A large, repulsive-looking man, of the desperado type, lay on a cot breathing heavily. A surgeon was standing by his side.

"Tom," said Grady, leaning over the cot, "what's this, how did it happen?"

The dying man opened his eyes and gazed up at him.

"Grady—you here?" he asked, feebly.

"Yes."

"I'm going fast—passing in my chips."

"But what's the matter, Tom?"

"Knocked out of time—caught a Tartar—too much for me."

"What was it?"

"I don't know—send 'em all away. I want to tell you something before I go."

Grady looked up at the surgeon and Ryder.

"Come into the other room with me, sir," said the surgeon to Ryder, leading the way to

an adjoining room. Ryder followed him, and Grady was left alone with the dying man.

"Now we are alone, Tom," he said, drawing a chair close to the side of the bed. "First tell me how this happened?"

"I was about three hours watching No. —, when a man passed me and laid a hand familiarly on my shoulder. I turned to see who it was."

"Oh, ah! excuse me," said the man. "I thought you were my friend Jones, and then turned away. Soon another man came by, and looking at me, said: 'You have a cross mark on your shoulder, sir.' I took off my coat and looked at the mark—a white cross made with chalk. The man who tapped me on the shoulder put it there."

"Yes," breathed Grady, through pallid lips; "go on."

"I would not rub it off. I wanted to see if anything would come of it, and so put on the coat again."

"An hour later, an ugly old dwarf, with his shaggy head drawn down between his shoulders, came along, and jostled me roughly."

"Keep off, you ugly old crab!" I exclaimed, giving him a kick. "There's plenty of room for two!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed the old dwarf, with a fiendish chuckle. "Tom Gregg, the child-stealer, can't afford to kick anybody."

"The devil!" ejaculated Grady.

"What do you mean? you miserable abortion?" I angrily exclaimed.

"Ha-ha-ha! Tom Gregg," he replied. "The little heiress of Green Dell, whom you thought the old dame had strangled and thrown into the river, still lives, and—before he could say any more, I uttered a hiss and sprang upon him."

"He threw up his long arms, caught me around the waist, and hurled me through the air, as though I was nothing but a football. I came down with a crash, and knew nothing more until I opened my eyes here, when they told me I was dying."

"Tom," hissed Grady, in his ear, "why did you tell me you threw that child into the river, when you did not?"

"The old hag told me she had done so in accordance with my orders, and I wanted to make sure of my reward."

"And you got it—leaving me now to be wrecked and die under the gallows!"

"We've both cheated the gallows so far," feebly replied the dying man. "I have sent for you to tell you this much. If you will look up the old woman you may yet undo the wrong you have done the girl, and—"

"Undo the wrong, give up the fortune, and give a free show under the gallows!" hissed Grady. "Never—never!"

"I cannot die with this terrible secret weighing my soul down to hell. Send for a—minister—Grady. I—want to—tell—all and—"

"Wretch!" hissed Grady, "would you betray me in your last moments when no law can reach you! You have but an hour to live—you are dying—an hour or two will make no difference to you—so good-by!" and seizing the dying man by the throat he held him as in the grip of a vise. Gregg was too feeble to struggle, and in five minutes he was dead—worthless clay.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH A MYSTERIOUS DWARF APPEARS ON THE SCENE.

GRADY glared down at the cold, lifeless form under his hands and made sure that he was dead.

"You will never place the hangman's noose about my neck with your chicken-hearted confessions, Tom Gregg," he hissed, relaxing his grasp on the dead man's throat, and smoothing away the evidence of violence. "You are only an hour ahead of time on your journey, but your confession would have cut off thirty years for me. Sorry I had to do it; but time is everything to me, and was nothing to you."

Waiting ten or fifteen minutes to compose himself, Grady then rose up, walked softly to the door through which Ryder and the surgeon had disappeared. Tapping lightly on it, he walked back towards the cot. The door opened and the surgeon came forward.

"I believe he's dead," said Grady, leaning over and gazing into the face of the dead man.

"Yes," replied the surgeon, "he is dead."

He didn't quite finish his story, when he gasped once or twice for breath, and then remained silent and still; I called him, but not receiving any answer, I knocked on the door for you. Are you sure he is dead, doctor?"

"Quite sure," replied the surgeon, with a grim smile. "They never get more so in this world."

"Have him buried decently, and send me the bill at the — hotel. Here is my card, sir," and Grady handed the surgeon his card containing his address.

"He was a friend of yours, was he?" asked the surgeon.

"I knew him well in my younger days, before he fell into evil ways. I bear the expense of his funeral for the sake of his family."

"Yes—yes; I understand and appreciate the sentiment," and the surgeon made a most profound bow as the two men left the hospital.

"I would have been a doomed man, Ryder," said Grady, when they were outside of the hospital, "had I not come at the time I did. He would have made confessions that would have raked up the dead past and stirred up the living present in a manner that would have startled the whole continent."

"I am glad you came, then. How did you manage to keep him from it?"

"Talked him to death, and acted as his confessor myself."

Ryder laughed heartily, but Grady was in no humor for laughing. He told the story of the dwarf who had given Gregg his death blow, saying nothing, however, about the heiress of Green Dell, to which the dwarf had alluded.

"An hour before the fight he was marked with the white cross," he added.

Ryder glared at him.

"Did he tell you that?"

"Yes," replied Grady.

"Then you must have blundered in putting him there."

"I think his actions gave him away," said Grady, looking across the street, as though some kind of an object attracted his attention.

"Be that as it may, I can see that we have got a terribly wily foe to deal with. What are you looking at over there?"

"It seems to me I can see a dark shadow dodging along under the shadow of the houses on the other side of the street," replied Grady, looking again; "but I don't see anything of it now."

"Well, some poor devil may be looking out for some place to sleep," said Ryder, "so come on and let's go back to—by George, look there!"

Ryder pointed across the street at a hideous deformity, which at that moment came under the flickering gaslight.

"The dwarf!" gasped Grady, turning deathly pale as he gazed at the monstrosity.

"Tom Gregg's dwarf?" asked Ryder, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes."

"Whom do you think he is?"

"The devil only knows; but he's been following us for more than ten minutes."

"Let's go up this street and see if he'll follow us."

Up the street they turned and the dwarf followed on the opposite side.

"Yes—yes—the hideous spy!" hissed Ryder; "we'll give him a taste of the danger of the game he is playing. Come, let's make for the river, and if he follows us there, we'll give him to the fishes."

The two villains wended their way towards the river, the dwarf dodging in and out of the shadows on the other side. On reaching the piers on the east side they tried to approach him; but like the Will-o'-the-Wisp, he kept a certain distance from them.

"Perdition seize the wretch!" hissed Ryder, "we've got to run him down and make an end of him, Grady."

"Let's go out to the end of the pier. Maybe he will follow part of the way."

When near to the end of the pier they saw him creeping along towards them with the stealthy tread of a cat. When half way the length of the pier the dwarf stopped and peered through the gloom, as if in search of the objects of his pursuit.

"Now is our time!" whispered Ryder, and creeping along on hands and knees on the right side, Grady going to the left, they both succeeded in getting behind the dwarf.

They then arose to their feet, and rushed towards him with drawn knives in their hands.

"Down with the spy!" hissed Grady, making a desperate lunge at him.

"Ha-ha-ha!" chuckled the dwarf, seizing him around the waist with his long, powerful arms, pinioning Grady's arms to his side. "Up with the child stealer!" and the next moment Grady found himself spinning through the air like a flying brickbat, coming down in the water with a tremendous splash.

"D—nation!" hissed Ryder, on witnessing this

terrible display of strength, stepping back and drawing his pistol. "What fiend of hell are you?"

With a screech that awoke the echoes up and down the mighty river, the dwarf sprang forward, seized Ryder, and hurried him over his head into the seething current ere he could find time to use his pistol. Then followed a fiendish laugh that sounded far out on the water, chilling the blood of those that heard it. Even the two wretches in the ice-cold water shuddered more at that Satanic screech than at the coldness of the water.

"Ha-ha-ha!" rang out that triumphant demoniacal laugh again. "Child stealer and murderer! Ha-ha-ha! swim out! Men born to hang can never drown—ha-ha-ha!"

The watchman on board a ship at the pier below crossed himself devoutly and prayed to be delivered from the devil, and the watch, whose duty it was to guard the pier, crept away with a chill of fear tugging at his heart which he could not shake off.

CHAPTER XVI.

COUNTER PLOTTING—THE DWARF HOLDS THE TRUMPS.

It was fortunate for the two villains that they were good swimmers, for the strong current carried them past the pier towards the shipping below. By dint of hard swimming, they struck the other pier, and climbed out of the water, hurling maledictions on the head of the terrible author of their ducking. The air became sulphurous with oaths, to which the dwarf listened with chuckling glee at the head of the dock.

"We must leave here before the watchman comes," said Ryder, "or we may be arrested. That fellow must be the devil himself."

"Were he ten thousand devils," muttered Grady, his teeth fairly rattling as he shivered with the cold, "I'll get even with him for this."

"Ha-ha-ha!" came that demon-like chuckle again.

"Come," said Ryder, with a shudder, "we will die with cold here. We must get back to the hotel and change our clothes."

Dripping with water, they wended their way along the street leading from the river, and had gone about two blocks when Grady espied the dwarf on the other side of the street, and now and then heard a chuckle that made their hearts sink.

"Let's give him away to that policeman ahead there?" suggested Ryder.

"No," said Grady, "that would never do. He knows too much. We must put him out of the way in a surer way than that. Let him alone for to-night."

But Ryder thought he would throw him off his track anyhow. He passed the policeman, slipped a five dollar gold coin into his hand, and whispered:

"Run that dwarf in for a burglarious character."

The knight of the locust looked around for the dwarf, and at last caught a glimpse of him across the street. He crossed over on a run, and seized him by the collar.

"Here, ye spalpeen—what are ye doing out so late from the ould 'ooman an' the childer, eh?"

"What the devil are you bothering quiet people for!" asked the dwarf. "It's your business to keep order and arrest the disorderly. Am I disorderly?"

"Ye are a suspicious character, and I'll run yer in for yer sass—come along!"

The dwarf remained immovable, and the astonished officer turned and seized him with both hands, and pulled with all his strength, still the dwarf never moved an inch.

"Howly Mother o' Moses!" exclaimed the policeman, "but I belave ye've growed to ther ground," and raising the club to strike, he struck—the ground in the middle of the street.

When he picked himself up he glared wildly around in search of the dwarf, but could see nothing of him.

"He was the devil himself! I smell ther brimstone an' sulphur—an' five dollars in gold. Chape price to tackle ould Nick for, an' I'm ther fool that did it."

Long before Ryder and Grady reached the Bowery they found the monstrosity on their trail again.

"It's no use," whispered Grady. "We must put up with him until we can get away with him. You can't shake him off, try hard as you may."

They went to the Occidental Hotel, took a room, and slept there till near noon the next day. When they left it they were disguised as two old

men. They saw nothing of the dwarf, however, and went to their hotel greatly relieved.

Going to their room, and laying aside their disguises, they sat down to discuss the situation.

"Now, Grady, deal with me honestly," said Ryder, looking his companion in the eyes. "Is that infernal imp of deformity after you, me, or both of us?"

"Both of us," replied Grady, "though he's after me on an old score of nearly twenty years ago."

"Then we must bend all our energies to the task of getting him out of the way," said Ryder.

"Joe Perry's trial comes off next week. Our lawyers will try to postpone it—stave it off on any pretext until after the trial of Linton, the only witness who can now appear against him. After conviction and sentence he cannot testify, and Howland won't dare come forward to swear against him. Joe will then be safe."

"Yes, I understand."

"But we don't want that dwarf shadowing us everywhere we go. He might pick up something that would trip us at the last moment, and land us in the Tombs."

"Or under the gallows," mused Grady, with a shudder.

"Yes; we must take him in hand, and send him to join Gomez."

"Then we'll do that to-night."

"To-night," repeated Ryder, as they left the room, and descended to the office below, where they mingled with the crowd of guests and loungers. As night came on the crowd became greater, and the buzz of conversation was incessant. Everybody was asking his neighbor for the latest news of the veiled woman mystery. The impenetrable mystery seemed to have taken deep root in the imagination of the metropolis, and hundreds of people racked their brains in vain endeavors to solve it.

Early in the evening Ryder and Grady strolled out on Broadway, not doubting that the ubiquitous dwarf would pounce upon their trail. But they walked up and down on either side of that great thoroughfare without once having obtained a glimpse of his deformity.

"By George!" exclaimed Ryder, "that's strange if he has given it up! Perhaps he's over on the Bowery watching the Occidental Hotel. We'll go over and see."

But he was not to be found there either, and the two villains returned to the hotel on Broadway disappointed and uneasy.

"Maybe they have learned all they want, and are now getting ready to pounce down on us."

"Not so, Grady," said Ryder, "that dwarf has been scooped in for resisting that officer last night. That's why he isn't on our trail to-night."

"Well, let's go up to bed and get a good night's sleep. I feel the want of it very much."

"You go up, Grady, and I'll come up within an hour. I want to smoke a cigar and have a game of billiards before I go to bed."

Grady went up to his room alone, and carefully inspected the lock on the door. Since the night he woke up with his head in a bag, he had been very particular in that duty.

"Oh, I guess everything is all right," he muttered, throwing off his coat.

"Ha-ha-ha!" came that fiendish chuckle, grating harshly on his ears. "All right, eh?"

Wheeling around, he was paralyzed with horror on seeing the dwarf—a grinning imp of hideous deformity, perched on the back of a chair, with a revolver in each hand leveled at his breast.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN IN THE TOMBS—A LIVING, PUZZLING MYSTERY.

THE reader must bear in mind the romantic escape of Ernest Howland from the Tombs.

The mysterious woman who remained in his stead—and in his clothes—kept perfectly quiet as to her identity until the next day, giving Ernest all the time desired to reach a place of safety and secure a proper disguise. She was sitting in the cell in a deep study when the door opened.

"Your lawyer to see you, sir," announced the warden, as he threw open the door.

"Ah, Mr. Howland," greeted the lawyer, stepping briskly forward, and extending his hand; "how are you to-day?"

"I am quite well, I thank you," she replied, taking his hand; "but think, perhaps, you have made a mistake. My name is not Howland."

"The devil!" exclaimed the warden, throwing the door wide open so as to get a good look at the prisoner.

Stepping out into the light, she turned and looked him full in the face.

"A woman, by the eternal gods!" exclaimed the warden, letting fall his bunch of keys in his astonishment.

"A woman!" echoed the lawyer, in amazement.

"Who are you?" gasped the warden.

"A woman," was the cool reply.

"And Howland is—"

"Gone—free—thank God!" she answered, interrupting him spiritedly, "and you may hang me in his stead, if you like."

The warden rushed down to the office and gave the alarm.

Within an hour every policeman in New York city and Brooklyn knew of the escape and was on the lookout for the fugitive.

In the meantime the lawyer remained with the mysterious lady, trying to learn her name.

"My name I will not give," she replied, firmly.

"Pardon me, I meant no offense."

"Of course," and she smiled. "Everybody will be anxious to know who and what I am; but they will all be disappointed. I have provided against discovery and exposure."

By this time the warden returned with other officials, and tried to entrap her into giving herself away.

But she merely laughed at them.

"Confound these women!" growled the warden, "they are always at the bottom of every trouble. If another gets inside of these walls, I'll see that it is a woman and not a man who goes out, that's all."

"Yes, and be sure you lock the stable door after the horse is gone," she retorted; at which there was a general laugh at the warden's expense.

The lawyer then went to the cell occupied by Charlie Linton. He informed Charlie of the escape of Ernest, and the romantic story of the unknown lady. Charlie was astounded.

"Who can she be?" he asked.

"Nobody seems to know, and she is as silent as a clam on the subject," the lawyer replied.

"Well, I am glad he is out, anyway," Charlie said, after a pause, "for he will never rest until he proves our innocence of this crime."

"Will he not be more likely to seek his own safety in flight?"

"You don't know Ernest Howland, sir, or you would not ask such a question."

"I must confess that I know but little about him," replied the lawyer. "But you have been his friend and companion for years. You surely ought to know whether or not he had any attachments—any love affair with any of his many female acquaintances."

"He had none, sir," promptly replied Charlie, "unless it was the mysterious lady who personated the Evening Star, at the Academy of Music. He fell desperately in love with her, though he has never seen her face, or heard her name except that of Eugenia."

"Eugenia!"

"Yes—the name of the unknown lady."

"Keep that name to yourself," whispered the lawyer, "don't breathe it to a living soul—at least not here."

"I will not, sir."

After a private conversation of several minutes, the lawyer took leave of Charlie and returned to the cell occupied by the unknown lady.

"Miss Eugenia," he said, as he entered the cell, "I am Mr. Howland's lawyer. You are in his shoes, and—"

"Clothes, too," she laughed.

He bowed, and continued:

"If you need any legal advice or assistance you must not hesitate to command me."

"Thank you, sir," she replied; "but if I am not mistaken I will prove so be an elephant they won't know what to do with."

The lawyer bowed himself out, vowing that she was a woman equal to the emergency, and left the Tombs to return to his office.

During the day the strange lady who had voluntarily made herself a prisoner in the stead of another, was compelled to lay aside the masculine suit of Ernest Howland for one more becoming her sex.

Every effort was then made during the week to identify her, but all in vain.

At last they suggested to the powers that were to release her, let her return to her home, shadowed by two detectives. Howland would thus be recaptured; for surely he would risk life even, to see and be with her who had done so much for him. The authorities listened to the suggestion, and one morning the mysterious lady was astonished at being told she was free to depart.

"Why, bless my soul!" she exclaimed, in well-feigned amazement, "I didn't expect this! I am so overjoyed, I hardly know what to say. Please accept my thanks for your kindness to me, Mr. Warden, and forgive my saucy impudence to you the next day after I came. Of course, I couldn't tell you who I was. Good-by."

The warden bowed respectfully, and saw her out to the carriage that was in waiting.

"Oh, I must walk," she said; "I have no money to pay for a carriage."

"The carriage is at your service, ma'am, to take you anywhere you may wish to go, without any charge."

"I really cannot permit that," she protested. "I've cheated you out of a prisoner, and—"

"Please excuse me, ma'am," insisted the warden, gently urging her towards the carriage door; "but really we cannot permit you to walk. Just tell the driver where you wish to go, and you will—"

"Drive to the St. Denis Hotel, please," she said, yielding, and entering the carriage.

The warden looked blank on hearing the order, but said nothing. He closed the carriage door, bowed, and the vehicle dashed off towards Broadway at a rapid pace.

"Just as I suspected!" she muttered, looking back through the glass lights in the rear of the carriage at a vehicle that was following her. "They think to entrap me by this dodge; but they will find a woman a match for the best detective in New York."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEREIN THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN ESCAPES—THE DWARF AGAIN.

"HAVE you any baggage, ma'am?" asked the polite clerk of the St. Denis Hotel, when he called on her in the lady's parlor for her name to put on the register.

"No, sir; I'm going to purchase a wardrobe immediately," she replied.

"I am sorry, ma'am," but the rule of the house is, that persons without baggage must pay in advance."

"Then bring me a blank check, and I will fill it out, and have you draw some money for me."

The clerk soon returned with a blank check. She took it, filled it out for one thousand dollars, and signed it simply "Eugenia."

"Please collect that for me, and pay yourself for one month's board," she said, handing him the check.

The proprietor took a carriage and hurried down to the banker on Wall street, on whom the check was drawn, and presented it.

The money was promptly counted out, and the proprietor returned to the hotel with it in his pocket, and a good-sized flea in his ear.

In the meantime the two detectives were busy trying to keep up with her. One kept her in sight while shopping, and the other investigated the banker on whom she had drawn so liberally.

"I know nothing about her, sir," said the banker. "She came here some two or three weeks ago, and deposited a sum of money, giving the single name and signature of 'Eugenia.'"

The detective bowed himself out.

"Sharp woman," he muttered; "the shrewdest that ever lived, for she doesn't leave a clew worth a continental shinplaster."

That evening the two detectives compared notes at the hotel, and concluded that she was laughing at them, and passed resolutions to run her down if it took all winter.

Early in the evening, the proprietor received a letter. It read:

"I am going away for a time. Please take good care of my baggage until I return.
9 A. M. EUGENIA."

The proprietor gave a low whistle of surprise, and beckoned to one of the detectives, who had made known to him his business, and handing him the letter, said:

"She is too much for you, Tooker."

"Helen Blazes!" hissed the detective, as he glanced rapidly over the note. "She's given us the slip!"

* * * * *

Let us now return to the hotel on Broadway, where, the reader will remember, we left Grady suddenly confronted in his room by the terrible hunchback dwarf, who, perched on the back of a chair, covered him with a brace of revolvers.

"Who—who—are—you?" gasped Grady, white as a sheet, his knees shaking under him, and his hair standing out like bristles.

"Who, me? Oh, I'm known by a great many names," chuckled the dwarf. "Some people call me the devil, and others, more irreverent, call me 'old Nick'; but I answer to most anything now-a-days!"

"What—do you want?" asked Grady, who was a man of splendid courage, fast recovering from his surprise.

"I want you," was the curt reply, "and I've got you—dead or alive, just as you choose to have it."

"Let it be dead, then," said Grady, quietly folding his arms, and facing the hideous deformity on the chair, "for I will never be taken alive."

"Very well, then, you choose death. But most people confess their sins at the last moment, and try to undo the wrongs they have done."

"I understand you," said Grady, in a hoarse whisper; "but as it's death either way, I will say nothing. Do your worst?"

"Fiend!" hissed the dwarf, flying at him with the suddenness of a serpent, and grasping him by the throat. "Die the death of a dog!"

The long, bony fingers closed like bands of steel around his throat. Grady sank to the floor limp and helpless in the grasp of that terrible foe. In an instant he was gagged, bound hand and foot. Then the dwarf searched his bosom, and drew from an inner pocket a small package wrapped and bound in well-worn oil silk.

"Ah, at last—at last!" he muttered, thrusting the packet into his bosom, his cold grey eyes lighting up with a gleam of triumph. "The crime of twenty years ago is righted at last, and the lost heiress of Green Dell is found! What, coming to, are you?"

Grady groaned.

He could not speak for the gag.

"Groan again," said the dwarf, "and to some purpose. Who killed Hopkins?"

Another groan.

The dwarf removed the gag.

"I don't know," said Grady. "I know nothing about it."

"You are lying, and—"

A knock on the door interrupted him, and the next moment a pass key was heard in the lock, and the door swung back, revealing Ryder and another man on the threshold.

The dwarf sprang like a tiger through the door, sending the stranger rolling over on the floor, and knocking Ryder into a cocked hat in the corridor.

"Help—murder!" yelled Grady, so lustily that the corridors were soon full of excited guests, to whom that terrible cry at midnight was appalling.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DESPERATE CHASE, AND RUN FOR LIFE.

AMID the uproar that followed the cry of murder, the dwarf sped along the corridor, upsetting everybody that got in his way. At the head of the stairs he saw half a score of men rushing up, and not caring to encounter them, he turned and took flying leaps up the stairs leading to the floor above.

A dozen men, with Ryder at their head, bounded up the staircase in hot pursuit. They rushed into and through every room on that floor, without seeing anything of the terrible dwarf.

"To the roof—to the roof!" cried Ryder. "He would never stop short of that!"

A man dashed up the stairs, and attempted to raise the trap door. As he did so, he received a blow in the face that sent him rolling down on those behind him.

"That's him!" screamed Ryder; "let me get a shot at him!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" came that harsh, demon-like laugh from the roof, and half the pursuers recoiled with horror depicted on their faces.

"Catch him—catch him!" yelled Grady, whom somebody had freed from his bonds, running up the stairs like a madman. "Don't let him escape! He has robbed me of important papers. I will give ten thousand dollars for him, dead or alive!"

This created the greatest excitement.

"Let me get out there—he'll get away—ten thousand to the man that shoots him down!"

"It's death to show your head above that hole!" said a man in the party.

"Cowards!" hissed Grady, perfectly livid with rage, dashing up the steps, and throwing the little scuttle-door open, climbed out on the roof.

"Crack—crack—crack!" went Grady's revolver.

"Let me out, there!" cried Ryder, running up the steps and scrambling out on the roof, followed by a dozen others.

"There he goes!" screamed Grady, running to the edge of the roof and firing at the dwarf, who was scampering across the roof of the third house away.

"Good Heavens, Grady!" exclaimed Ryder, stopping on the brink of the precipice. "It's full thirty feet down to that roof. How did he reach it?"

"He went over there—ah! down this tin water spout! Follow me, Ryder. My life depends on getting those papers!"

In another minute Grady had reached the lower roof and was dashing across the other houses in frantic pursuit.

"By all the gods of war!" cried Ryder, "I can't let him fight it out alone with that demon! I'm going to his assistance."

Ryder let himself down over the edge of the roof, sliding down the tin spout to the roof below. A cheer greeted him as he landed safely, and darted off to join Grady in the pursuit.

"There he goes!" cried Grady, pointing to a dark object gliding along the roofs to the houses on the upper end of the block.

"Crack—crack—crack!" went the revolvers of the pursuers, followed by a blood-curdling screech from the dwarf who suddenly disappeared over the edge of the roof.

They ran to the spot where he was last seen, and there found a painters' scaffold tackle suspending a scaffold in the air, half way from the roof to the ground, in front of a building that was receiving a new coat of paint.

"There he goes sliding down the rope!"

"Crack—crack!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" came back that mocking laugh again, as the dwarf landed on the scaffold and immediately suspended himself under the planks, hanging by his hands to screen himself from the bullets.

"Cut the ropes—cut the ropes!" cried Ryder. "The fall will kill him! Ha-ha-ha! you imp of hell! We have you now! Cut away there, Grady—cut away, quick!"

Ryder drew his knife and commenced cutting the ropes that coiled around the heavy piece of projecting timber. Madly, frantically he cut away at the ropes, and one by one the coils were severed.

"Ah! There you go, imp of darkness!" hissed Ryder, as the last rope gave way under his knife, letting that end of the scaffold swing downwards with a crash towards the earth, leaving it suspended by one end in the air spinning around and around like a top.

"Look! He is climbing down the planks!"

"Quick!—out of the way! Fire at him while I cut at the ropes!"

"He is climbing lower and lower to break his fall!"

"Oh, for an ax to cut all at a single blow!"

Cut—cut—cut!

"Ha-ha-ha!" came up from below that mocking laugh.

The dwarf had let himself down to the lower end of the suspended planks, and turned his face upwards only a moment before Ryder severed the last coil of rope, letting the scaffold fall to the earth with a terrible crash, accompanied by the demoniacal screech of the hunchbacked dwarf.

CHAPTER XX.

A TERRIBLE CHASE, AND THRILLING ESCAPE OF THE DWARFED HUNCHBACK.

A DEMON-LIKE screech rang out on the night air, above the crash of the falling scaffold.

"I guess that settled him!" said Ryder.

"Yes, he could not escape in such a fall as that," replied Grady; "but how are we going to get down to him? I must have those papers at all hazards."

"Go back the way we came!" Ryder answered.

"But we can't climb up that spout, though we did descend by it, and—"

"Ha-ha-ha!" came that mocking, triumphant laugh from below. "You let me down nicely—much obliged. Good-night!"

"By all the gods!" cried Ryder in great consternation. "That imp is alive yet! He must bear a charmed life!"

"That fall would have killed any man, but he is a devil!" cried Grady, his face white as a sheet. "Look! There he goes, as easily as though he had walked down a flight of stairs. Ryder, unless I get those papers it's all over with me!"

"Set the police after him, then!" called out Ryder, greatly excited. "There come two of them now. Police—police!"

"What's the matter up there?" called out an officer below.

avenue in New York city, having succeeded in hoodwinking the mysterious fruit-peddler, whom they left watching the front of the old brick house in Williamsburgh.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH THE FRUIT-PEDLER THROWS A BOMB-SHELL INTO COURT.

"GOOD news, Grady!" exclaimed Ryder, rubbing his hands gleefully, as he entered Grady's room about a week after they had effected their escape from Williamsburg and the unknown spy.

"Joe Perry's lawyers have succeeded in getting his trial postponed at least three months. That's all the time we want. Linton will be sentenced and convicted long before that time, which will kill his evidence entirely."

"When will Linton's case be called?" Grady asked.

"Some time during the present week, I believe."

"Then I guess Linton will feel as if the white cross was too much for him after all."

In three days after the postponement of Joe Perry's trial for the murder of Allan, at the Academy of Music, the case of Charles Linton, charged with the murder of Josiah Hopkins, was called. The court-room was crowded by the friends of the accused, many of whom had been summoned as witnesses to prove his good character.

Ryder, not having any further cause to remain *incognito*, though Grady was disguised as an old man, appeared with the policeman who had arrested Howland and Linton. The policeman was the first witness called.

"Give it straight," whispered Ryder, as the policeman arose to take his seat in the witness stand.

He testified to the facts truthfully as he understood them—that a man came running up to him, saying he heard the cry of murder in No. — Crosby street, and that he hurried down there as fast as he could, burst in the door, rushed up stairs, and found Ernest Howland and Charles Linton—the prisoner—kneeling by the side of deceased with his hands in his pockets, as if searching them. This testimony was sustained by several citizens, residents of Crosby street, who followed the policeman into the house. Two days were consumed in taking the evidence for the prosecution.

Then followed the witnesses for the accused. Henry Morgan and all the clerks, male and female, in his large dry goods establishment in Grand street, testified to the uniform character of the accused.

"Do you know anything about the murder of Mr. Hopkins?" the prosecuting attorney would ask.

"No, sir," they would reply.

"You may step down."

"Call Joe Handley," said Linton's lawyer.

"Joseph Handley—Joseph Handley!" cried the deputy sheriff.

"Here!" answered a voice in the densely packed audience of spectators, making strenuous efforts to reach the inclosure that protected the bar.

"Come forward, and be sworn," said the clerk.

On reaching the clerk's desk, the witness turned and glanced at Ryder, who was sitting behind one of the lawyers for the prosecution. Their eyes met, and Ryder started as if stung.

"That fruit-peddler!" he gasped.

Grady sprang to his feet, and elbowed his way out of the crowded court-room, although he was so disguised that no one knew him as Grady.

The clerk of the court handed the Bible to the witness.

"Do you solemnly swear that the evidence you shall give in this case shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

"I do."

"Mr. Hadley," said the lawyer for the defense, "what is your business or occupation?"

"I am a fruit-peddler, sir."

"Where do you reside?"

"In this city, at No. — in Seventeenth street."

At the mention of that number, Ryder started and paled a little.

"Where were you on the night of the murder of Josiah Hopkins?"

"I was in different places—in Thirty-Fourth street, Broadway, and Crosby street."

"Were you in Crosby street at the time of the killing of Hopkins?"

"I was."

"State what you know about it."

"I had gone into No. — Crosby street," said the pedler, "hoping to meet a friend there by appointment. When I reached the head of the stairs, I heard a groan, a cry of murder, followed by a fall, as of a man falling heavily to the floor, and rapid footsteps, as though two or three men were hurrying away on tip-toe. I rushed into the room where I heard the noise, and saw the deceased lying on the floor, gasping for breath, in the agonies of death, with a dagger driven to the hilt in his breast."

"Did you see the prisoner there?"

"I did. He came into the room after I entered, and—"

"May it please the court!" exclaimed the prosecuting attorney, springing to his feet in a blaze of excitement, "this is a most extraordinary witness. Not one of all the witnesses on either side have made any mention of this witness in their testimony, and yet he claims to have been the first to enter the room after the cry of murder was heard. He is a perjurer—a hired witness—brought forward at this late hour to save the prisoner from the gallows!"

"Let the witness go on," said the judge, curtly.

The pedler did go on, entirely acquitting Linton and Howland of all complicity in the murder, to the utter astonishment of everybody not the personal friend of the prisoner—even Linton himself was astounded at the evidence, and Ryder was dazed—dumbfounded, and knew not what to think.

"You may go down, Mr. Hadley," said Linton's lawyer, when he had finished.

"Hold on, sir!" called out the prosecuting attorney. "I want to ask you a few questions before you go."

The pedler resumed his seat in the witness chair.

"Now, sir, remember you are under oath!" said the lawyer, savagely. "They call you Hadley—is that your name, sir?"

"No, sir."

Sensation!

"Ah! what is it, sir, if you please?"

"Juan Gomez!" he replied, removing the heavy false beard he wore, to the amazement of court, jury, and audience, all of whom stared with bated breaths at the witness.

With a sound between a gasp and a hiss, and with a face from which every vestige of color had fled, Ryder sprang to his feet and made a dash for the door.

"Stop that man!" cried Gomez, suddenly springing to his feet, and pointing towards Ryder, "he is one of the real murderers who put up this job on Linton and Howland!"

"It's false—a lie!" hissed Ryder, in desperation. "Let me pass, or—"

"Ha—ha—ha!" chuckled the terrible dwarf, as he placed himself in front of him. "You can't pass—you must play this hand!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TRIUMPH OF VILLANY—SENTENCED TO THE GALLOWES.

ON finding himself confronted by the terrible hunchbacked dwarf, who stood between him and the door, with that sardonic grin on his ugly face, Ryder drew a revolver with the intention of clearing a pathway for himself.

"Too late to shoot now!" hissed the dwarf, throwing his powerful arms around him, holding his hands close to his side, while a deputy-sheriff disarmed him.

"Let the trial go on—the witness will resume his evidence where he left off," said the judge; and the silence of the grave fell upon the audience again.

"You say your name is Juan Gomez?" asked the prosecutor, resuming the cross-examination.

"Yes, sir."

"How is that? You answered to the name of Hadley when you were called to the witness stand an hour ago?"

"I adopted the name and disguise as a protection, sir."

"A protection!"

"Yes. That man there," pointing to Ryder, "had attempted to kill me, and to escape him and his hired murderers, I was compelled to resort to a disguise."

"Why did he try to kill you?"

"Because I had heard both himself and another man admit that they sent the note to Howland to go to No. — Crosby street, and then murdered Hopkins just as they got there, warned the policeman, and caused their arrest."

Amid breathless silence the prosecuting attorney remarked:

"That is something very extraordinary. It

would have been easier to kill Howland and thus get rid of him. Can you tell us *why* they put up this extraordinary job on the prisoner?"

"I know nothing further than what I heard them say when I stood behind the curtain, in the ladies parlor of the — hotel, when they were talking about it. They said the conviction of the prisoners would destroy their testimony against Joe Perry, and thus save Joe and hang them."

A murmur of amazement ran around the room, and the words, "white cross—white cross," were heard whispered on all sides. The hour was growing late, and after issuing a warrant for the arrest of Ryder, the court adjourned to the next day. Ryder was remanded to the Tombs, and placed in the cell which Howland and the mysterious veiled lady had occupied. But he did not throw himself on the little cot and give up in despair. By no means. He sent for one of the best criminal lawyers in the city, engaged him as counsel, gave him a check for a thousand dollars as a retainer, and then sent him in search of Grady, whose hiding place he revealed. The lawyer found Grady, and told him of the situation of Ryder.

"Now," said the lawyer, "Ryder says that you know, and that a dozen other friends know that he was in another part of the city during that entire night, and that the fact must be shown to-morrow in court. Do you know where those friends can be found, Mr. Grady?"

"Yes," said Grady; "but I will have to see them to-night, they are so scattered."

"Well, you have no time to lose. You had better go and hunt them up, and report to me at my office early to-morrow morning."

On the opening of the court it was announced that another lawyer had been added to the counsel for the prosecution. Gomez was permitted to resume his story, which he told just as it is known already to the reader. Then Grady, disguised, and answering to the name of Brownell, was sworn, and deposed that on the night of Hopkins' death, Ryder spent the entire night at his rooms in the — Hotel, playing cards with a number of friends; that he knew Gomez well—had known him several years as a worthless character, whom he would not believe under oath, if it was worth a dollar to him to swear falsely.

Gomez was utterly astounded at the old man's evidence, and glared at him in unfeigned wonder. But his amazement was handicapped when nearly half a score of other witnesses, whom he had never before seen, swore to a similar story, and tearing his character into shreds! Nearly all of them said they knew him for a worthless beat, and that his cock and bull story about Ryder trying to kill him was utterly absurd—impossible. The result was the utter destruction of his evidence by impeachment, and the conviction of Linton.

"My God!" gasped Linton. "Is there no justice in New York? I don't understand the evidence all through; but I do know that I am innocent of this crime—as innocent as an unborn babe."

Ryder and Grady met in the throng after the verdict, and silently shook hands over their triumph. Gomez saw the action, and pressed forward and hissed in Ryder's ear:

"You have triumphed over an innocent man, Ryder; but I swear by the white cross you have on your back, that this hour has sealed your fate, and—"

"By Heavens—the white cross!" cried one of the perjured villains, on seeing the fatal mark on Ryder's back.

The most intense excitement prevailed in the court-room, and judge, jury and lawyers pressed forward to see the mark that carried so much blood and mystery with it. Pale, and trembling like an aspen leaf, Ryder asked someone to brush it off. It was done, and the crowd dispersed, leaving the unfortunate Linton to be escorted back to prison, where he would remain unsentenced until his counsel argued for a new trial.

But so complete was the evidence against him that every effort of his counsel failed, and he was brought up for sentence. There should be but one opinion as to what that sentence would be—death—under the gallows!

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDER THE GALLOWES—HOWLAND APPEARS—A DESPERATE NEMESIS.

TIME rolled on, and the day for the execution of Charles Linton drew near.

One day a lady, fashionably dressed and heavily veiled, applied at the Tombs to see him.

"Your name, ma'am?" asked the warden.

"Mrs. Clinton," was the reply.

"Arrest that dwarf—that ugly hunchback, going off there—he's a thief and murderer!"

"Catch him—catch him!" cried Grady, from the roof. "Ten thousand dollars for him, dead or alive!"

"That's my prize," muttered the foremost officer, pulling his cap down well over his eyes, and darting forward in the direction the dwarf was going when last seen.

The other one, equally stimulated by the magnificence of the reward offered, likewise darted forward, and the next minute both were well out of sight and hearing.

"Let me get down!" groaned Grady, in an agony of suspense, turning toward the corner of the hotel near which they had descended to the lower roof.

"Throw us a rope, quick!" called out Ryder, to the anxious spectators who stood on the roof of the hotel.

"I'll get one," replied the clerk, running to the quarters of the laundry women, and getting from them a clothes line.

In a few minutes they were drawn up to the roof.

Grady did not wait to answer questions, but hurried around to the other side of the block, followed by Ryder and nearly a score of eager spectators.

On reaching the spot where the scaffold fell, it was easy to see why the dwarf had not been killed by the fall. The lower end of the scaffold hung down within eight or ten feet of the ground. The dwarf had let himself down to the end, clinging to the planks, for the purpose of dropping thence to the ground. Just as the last coil of the rope was severed, the dwarf released his grasp of the planks, and dropped to the ground, the scaffold going with him. He was uninjured, though making a narrow escape from the falling timbers.

Ryder and Grady sped around the block in the direction the two pursuing officers had gone, in the vain hope of getting a glimpse of the fugitive.

"He has gotten away, Grady," said Ryder, as they stopped to get breath and look around. "He bears a charmed life. I never saw such daring, such reckless disregard of danger."

Three officers came towards them. Two of them were the policemen who gave pursuit at the first alarm.

"That chap is in this block somewhere," said one of the officers, as they came up. "Who was it that told us to catch him?"

"I did," replied Grady, "and the man that catches him before he gets away with those papers will get ten thousand dollars!"

"Good enough!" replied the officer, turning and holding a short private consultation with his two comrades. They at once marched off, each taking a stand on the corners of the block, to watch if any one should attempt to leave it.

An hour passed, and everybody, save Ryder, Grady, and the three officers, had left the vicinity. Grady himself was almost on the eve of retiring to the hotel and giving over the search for the night. The officers took a description of the dwarf and retired, going to their respective posts of duty.

"I'm a ruined man!" gasped Grady, actually getting so weak in the legs as to be compelled to grasp Ryder's arm for support.

"Ha-ha-ha—that you are!" came in a sepulchral tone of voice, seemingly coming from the ground underneath their feet.

"Blazes!" ejaculated Ryder, looking around fiercely. "That's the imp, as sure as fate!"

"Good God—it comes from the ground!"

"I thought so, too!" exclaimed Ryder, looking along the gutter that led towards the sewer. Suddenly he sprang to the side of Grady, and whispered:

"He is in one of those coal holes! That accounts for his sudden disappearance."

Grady stared first at his companion, and then at the iron plate over the nearest coal hole.

"Yes," he whispered, "that's where he is. Let's conceal ourselves in the shadow of the entrance of this store here, and wait for him to come out."

The two villains crouched within the shadow of the entrance to the building, and awaited in silence for further developments.

During the next half hour no one passed along that block save a solitary policeman on his beat. As he approached, the two villains shrank back further under the shadows, and thus escaped being seen. A few minutes after he passed, one of the iron plates that covered the coal holes along the front of the buildings suddenly tilted up on one side. The next moment it was shoved aside, and the head and shoulders of the terrible dwarf appeared above the surface. Just as both hands rested on the smooth surface of the

pavement, with half the body below, Ryder hissed:

"Now!" and darted towards him, followed by Grady, each with knives drawn, ready to annihilate him.

Ere they reached him the dwarf uttered that unearthly screech and bounded upwards like a champagne cork, by the strength of his arms, landing on his feet before their astonished eyes.

"Kill him!" hissed Ryder, making a desperate thrust at him with his knife.

The dwarf parried the thrust, and sent the knife flying thirty feet in the air.

"D—nation!" hissed Grady, recoiling as he found himself alone face to face with his terrible foe, drawing his revolver.

"Ha-ha, my fine fellow!" cried the dwarf, leveling his revolver at Grady's breast. "The first fire wins—I've got it—raise your hand if you dare!"

Crack! went Grady's revolver in his maddened desperation.

Crack! replied the dwarf, in return, and Grady sank down insensible.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WICKED FLEE—THE MYSTERIOUS FRUIT-PEDLER.

WHEN Grady came to he found himself in his room in the hotel, lying in bed with his head swathed in bandages. Ryder and two friends were in the room with him. One of them was a surgeon.

He groaned as the situation dawned on his mind.

"Ah! Grady," said Ryder, going quickly to the bedside. "You feel better now, do you not?"

"No, Ryder, I never felt worse in my life. Has any one called to see me?"

"No, only one or two friends," and then placing his lips close to his ear, Ryder whispered: "But hush—don't utter another word!"

Grady remained silent, and a few minutes later the two precious villains were alone together, the surgeon and friend having left.

"Ryder," said Grady, "we must get away from here at once; at least, I must, and—"

"But where will you go?" quickly interrupted Ryder; "you are in no condition to travel."

"You must find a place, hire a carriage, act as driver yourself, and take me away. With those papers gone, I am no longer safe in New York."

"I will go now, then, for we have no time to lose."

Ryder left, and was gone several hours. When he returned it was with a carriage which he drove himself. He found Grady up and dressed, ready to accompany him, though very weak from loss of blood. Throwing a large cloak over him, Ryder led him down to the carriage, placed him comfortably in it, mounted the seat and drove away, leaving word with the clerk of the hotel that he was taking him to the house of a friend in Harlem.

Instead of Harlem the carriage was driven over to Williamsburgh, stopping in front of a gloomy-looking old brick building, which had long stood with a card "to let" on the front door.

The wounded man was assisted out of the carriage into the house, and led into a room which had just been furnished by orders given to a dealer by Ryder.

"Here you are safe," said Ryder, as Grady threw himself on the bed. "The dwarf nor the white cross can find you here."

"Yes—yes! I will be well again in a week or two, but must have a disguise."

"Of course, I must get one, too, else I would be followed, and thus lead to your arrest," said Ryder, after a pause. "We must be cautious and go slow. You will not need a doctor again, as I can dress your wound for you now, since I saw him do it."

Grady nodded assent, and Ryder arose to leave, saying:

"I must drive the carriage back and get the disguises."

As he descended the stoop to the pavement he noticed a fruit-pedler gazing at the house from the opposite side of the street, as though calculating the chances of selling some of his stock to its supposed inmates.

He crossed over and was about to ring at the basement door, when Ryder very roughly ordered him away with:

"Off with you! They want no fruit in there!" The pedler turned away without uttering a word, and Ryder mounted to the box, and drove away. As the carriage passed him, the pedler nimbly climbed up behind, and ensconced him-

self there, keeping his position until the vehicle reached the stable whence it belonged. There he leaped to the ground and walked away without attracting Ryder's attention.

"Halloo!" exclaimed the stableman, going around behind the carriage, "what does this mean?"

"What is it?" asked Ryder, going around to where he was standing.

The stableman pointed to a mark on the ebony surface of the carriage.

"The white cross!" gasped Ryder, in positive amazement.

"Where have you been?"

"To Harlem," was the reply.

"Well, it may be a joke," said the stableman, "but I don't like it. Sorry I didn't send a driver with you."

"Oh, it's nothing but a joke," laughed Ryder, as he turned away and left the stable.

It was late in the evening when Ryder returned to the somber-looking old brick house in Williamsburgh. As he entered the house, the fruit-pedler was crying:

"Sweet oranges! Bernaners!" on the opposite side of the street.

The next morning Ryder left the house disguised as an elderly, white-haired gentleman, wearing a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses. The fruit-pedler met him at the foot of the stoop with his basket of fruit.

"Sweet oran—"

"Be off, you rascal!" cried Ryder. "There's nobody here that wants any fruit, and don't you come here with it again."

The pedler said nothing, but quietly turned away, crying his fruit in a sing-song tone of voice. Ryder wended his way towards the ferry, the pedler going in the same direction. Both crossed over on the Grand street ferry, and when Ryder entered a horse car, the fruit pedler mounted the front platform. But the disguised villain did not notice the fact, nor did he see the pedler again until he reached the ferry on his way back to Williamsburgh. Then the sight of him aroused his suspicions.

"By George!" he muttered to himself; "can he be watching me? I see him first on one side of the river and then on the other; the first thing in the morning, and the last thing at night. I'll set a trap for him to-morrow morning, and see if he'll fall into it."

On opening the door of the old brick house, the next morning, the fruit pedler was slowly going by crying his fruit. Ryder motioned him to approach, and the pedler promptly responded.

"Sweet oranges!" cried the pedler, as he neared the stoop.

"Yes, a half dozen," said Ryder, tossing him a small silver coin.

The pedler counted the oranges, and handed them to him with the change.

"Now, my good fellow," said Ryder, "would you like to make an extra dollar?"

"Yes, boss."

"I want somebody to take this letter to the address in Jersey City, and bring me an answer, as I haven't time to wait for the mails."

"Can't go that far, boss," said the pedler, promptly, taking up his basket and moving off.

Ryder re-entered the house.

"Grady!" he said, entering the room occupied by the wounded man, "the house is watched. We must contrive some plan by which we can effect our escape."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know. He is a fruit pedler. There he goes now on the opposite side of the street."

Grady looked through the blinds at the pedler, who seemed intent on selling fruit on that particular block.

"Then we must get away from here to-night," said Grady, his lips quivering, "and we must make sure work of it, too."

"Then I will go out in town so as to disarm suspicion, and come back early in the day."

The fruit-pedler did not appear to notice him as he left the house, and Ryder went away, feeling better that he was not followed. When he returned in the afternoon, Grady had arranged a plan by which they could escape across the yard in the rear of the premises to an old vacant lot that fronted on the next street.

It was near midnight when they left the back door of the old brick house, leaving a lamp burning in the room they had just vacated, and climbed over the high fence that cut off the vacant lot from the premises. Once inside the old vacant lot their exit was easy. They only had one more fence to climb, and that was easily effected. Down the street they went, taking the first street car that came along. In two hours they were domiciled in a small hotel on Fourth

The warden took down her name and address, and then conducted her to the cell of the condemned man.

"Mr. Linton," she said, as soon as she was alone with him, "I am the veiled lady who is the innocent cause of your cruel fate. I have come to tell you that I am using my entire fortune to save you, and that I am not without hope of success."

"It is too late!" murmured poor Charlie, bursting into tears; "I am doomed—doomed to die under the gallows! But I am glad Ernest has escaped. If you ever meet him tell him I loved him as a brother to the last, and forgive him for not keeping his oath with me, because I know now that he could not help himself. I suppose he is in Europe, or—"

"He is in this city—has never left it," whispered the lady. "Night and day has he worked in your interest, never flagging a moment in the task."

Linton stared at the beautiful woman incredulous surprise.

"Ernest in New York!" he gasped. "Impossible!"

"I saw and talked with him no longer than last night," she said, in the greatest earnestness.

"He will be caught!"

"No, he is too well disguised for that."

"I pray God he may escape," said Linton, with earnest fervency. "Tell him to go away—to take my money in the hands of Mr. Morgan, and go to the other side of the world, where he will be safe from detection and arrest."

"I will tell him what you say," she said, rising to leave. "But let me say to you to be hopeful, even while getting ready for the worst. If the worst comes to the worst, I will devote my life and fortune towards vindicating your memory and punishing your enemies. Good-by, I will come again in a few days."

That night Linton made a will, giving all he owned to Ernest Howland, as he had no relatives living, and began to prepare for the terrible doom that awaited him on the morrow. He never slept during the night, but sat up, writing and thinking. He appeared calm and resigned, evincing not the slightest sign of fear.

The dawn of day found him writing the story of the conspiracy, as far as he could fathom it, that had doomed him to a felon's death under the gallows. When completed, he placed it in the hands of his lawyer, to be used in vindicating his memory when opportunity should occur in after years. The large-hearted lawyer pledged himself to carry out his wishes as far as would be in his power to do so, and then took leave of him.

Everything being in readiness, the sheriff came to his cell to prepare him for the scaffold. He was soon ready, and marched out with him with a firm, steady step, that astonished the officials.

In the inner court, or yard of the Tombs, about forty persons had assembled to witness the execution, a privilege granted through official favor.

Among them Charlie quickly recognized Juan Gomez.

Everything being in readiness, the doomed man was placed in position under the gallows.

"Have you anything to say, Mr. Linton?" asked the kind-hearted sheriff, holding the black cap in his hand. "If so, now is the time."

"Yes," said Linton, in a calm, collected tone of voice. "Not that I hope to benefit myself, but simply to say with my dying breath, as I stand on the brink of eternity, that Ernest Howland and myself are innocent of this crime. There is a mystery in which that white cross figures, which overshadows us and dooms us to death. We were lured to that house in order that we might be arrested and punished as the real murderers of that man. Some day the real criminal will, on a death-bed, confess the crime and I will be vindicated. I die forgiving all, and hope Ernest Howland may remain beyond the reach of the law until his good name and my memory have been cleared of this stigma. He pledged himself to stand by me, and I know that he—"

"Will do it!" exclaimed Juan Gomez, suddenly throwing aside his hat, pulling off his dark wig that had so effectually disguised him. "I am here to die with you, Charlie, since I have

failed to bring the real murderers under the gallows."

"My God!" exclaimed Linton, leaning forward and gazing into the olive-stained face of Ernest Howland. "That is the voice of Ernest Howland!"

"Yes, I am Ernest Howland," he replied, coolly facing the spectators, who were overwhelmed with amazement. The sheriff started towards him.

"You need not trouble yourself, Mr. Sheriff, I have come to surrender myself. Let me say what I have to say before my friend there shall be no more. Charlie, I found the real murderers, but they swore themselves clear by perjured witnesses, and the jury believed them instead of me. The mysterious lady who enabled me to escape aided me all in her power—but in vain. You are to die for the crime of others, and I will follow you. You die an innocent man, but not unavenged, for before your eyes are closed in death you shall see the real murderers perish! Villains! Murderers!" he hissed, suddenly drawing a revolver, and aiming at Ryder, fired. "Down—down to death before me!"

CHAPTER XXV.

CONFESSIONS OF THE REAL MURDERERS—CONCLUSION.

WITH a shriek of pain, Ryder clasped his hands to his heart, staggered backwards, and would have fallen but for Grady, who, disguised as Brownell, threw his arms around him, and held him up. The crowd, fearing more shots in the same direction from the desperate man, gave way in a panic, leaving the two doomed men fair targets.

"I heard you both say you killed Hopkins (crack), and now (crack) I'll come to your killing (crack). If I am to be hung (crack), it shall not be (crack) without cause (crack)."

Ere the dumbfounded spectators could interfere, Howland had poured the contents of his revolver into Ryder and Grady, who both went down under his unerring aim.

They lay writhing in agony. The spectators seeing that he had fired the last shot, rushed forward and secured him. Others attended to the dying men.

"Charlie, you are avenged!" cried Ernest, triumphantly, "and I can die content."

"I did not desire to be avenged, Ernest," said Linton, sadly. "I have forgiven all my enemies."

"You are made of different stuff from what I am, Charlie," said Ernest; "but you can say that you had no hand in this. I alone am responsible for it, and am ready to swing with you, since they cannot enjoy the triumph over our misfortune."

"Oh, my friend!" moaned Charlie. "You have made my last hour a bitter one. I had hoped you were safe on some foreign shore, and—"

"Hush!" commanded the sheriff; "these men are making a statement."

"I—I am dying!" gasped Ryder, "and—deserve it. I and Grady—murdered Hopkins."

"Thank God!" cried Henry Morgan, running to where Ernest and Charlie were standing, and embracing them. "Saved—saved! Free—free!"

"Yes—we did it!" gasped Grady, with his last breath. "They—are—inno—ah—gurgles," and giving a convulsive shudder, a gurgling sound in his throat, and Grady was dead.

Ryder lived a few minutes longer, reiterated his confession of the murder, and was about to give his reasons for the crime, when the icy hand of death cut him short.

"Mr. Linton," said the sheriff, smilingly removing the rope from around his neck, "please excuse me, but I must postpone this entertainment until we can get a more deserving victim."

The two friends fell on each other's neck, and wept tears of joy.

"You have saved me, Ernest!"

"Thank God for the desperation of the moment!"

"Come, let's return inside, and report the case to the judge," said the sheriff, leading the way into the reception office of the Tombs.

The news of the tragedy spread like wildfire over the city, and people were amazed—bewildered. That two innocent young men could be conspired against by a number of villains, and by due process of law be doomed to an ignominious death under the gallows, seemed incredible. It seemed like a dream—a romance of the middle ages rather than a reality of the nineteenth century. Thousands of people who had bitterly denounced the two young men, now extolled them to the skies.

In due time the two young men were released, and received the congratulations of every official in the metropolis, besides hosts of friends whom this narrow escape had made them.

Henry Morgan, their employer, gave a banquet at his residence in their honor, at which the mysterious veiled lady was announced to appear. Such a jam was never seen in and around any private residence in New York city, as gathered at the Morgan residence that night. The crush was appalling, and when the veiled lady was announced, it was apprehended that lives would be lost in the pressure. She came forward, leaning on Ernest and Charlie's arms, a superbly beautiful woman, dressed as the Evening Star, bowing and smiling to the admiring multitude. They led her outside that she might be seen, and then back to the large parlors where they joined in the dance.

She was an orphan girl of twenty-two, Eugenia Clinton, whom a maiden aunt had left a fortune a few years before. She was also the heiress of Green Dell, her uncle's will having been stolen by Grady when she was an infant, and herself given to a villain to be destroyed that another might inherit the property. These were the papers, establishing their identity and claims, which the old dwarf took from the person of Grady on that eventful night at the hotel.

The dwarf had been a faithful confidential servant of Eugenia's father when she was a little child, and had loved her for her father's sake. What the secret bond was that bound the master and servant so closely together was never known, as her father died with the secret unrevealed; but the old dwarf never ceased to watch the growth and budding beauty of Eugenia Clinton after her father's death.

He kept his thoughts to himself when he heard that her uncle's will, which gave to her Green Dell, with its beautiful fountains and statuary, had been stolen, thus leaving the property to another. For the sake of his dead friend and master he devoted his life to the recovering of those papers, and restoration of the daughter's rights. Like a sleuth hound, he pursued an almost imperceptible clew until his suspicions rested and centered on Grady as the guilty one. His dogged perseverance, indomitable courage and almost superhuman strength at last enabled him to secure the papers that established her identity, and made Eugenia Clinton one of the wealthiest young ladies in the state.

The gratitude of the young heiress was boundless; she gave him a liberal life annuity, and thus insured a life of ease and comfort to the daring man who had risked his life and honor in her cause.

"Eugenia," said Ernest, to the beautiful lady, as she hung on his arm, "you saved my life once by a sacrifice but few would make for another. May I ask you now to make the life you saved one of perpetual joy and happiness?"

"Yes; tell me how to do it."

"By becoming my wife, and—"

"Oh, that's easily done," she laughingly replied. "Send for a minister, and I will enter on the task at once."

"What! To-night?"

Of course the minister was sent for in great haste, and the next morning the papers recorded a marriage as well as the incidents of the grand banquet.

The dark cloud had passed away, and Ernest Howland and Charles Linton no longer dwelt under its shadow. They stood before the world untarnished—vindicated. Ernest was now the happy husband of a beautiful wife, adoring and adored, in whose loving smiles he basked as though he had never once stood UNDER THE GALLOWES.

[THE END.]

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